



Volume 6  
July 2019

# International Journal of Christianity & English Language Teaching

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A refereed, online journal on Christianity and ELT

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The *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* is a free, open access publication from the Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA, see <http://www.celea.net/>), an international, non-profit association for those in English language teaching.



The *IJC&ELT* is also supported by the Department of Applied Linguistics and TESOL in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University in La Mirada, California. Visit <http://cook.biola.edu/programs/linguistics-tesol/> for more information. The *IJC&ELT* gratefully acknowledges this support.

The *IJC&ELT* acronym logo and cover page title were designed by Daniel McClary ([Daniel.McClary@Millersville.edu](mailto:Daniel.McClary@Millersville.edu)), of Millersville University of Pennsylvania, on behalf of CELEA. This service to the *IJC&ELT* is appreciated.



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*International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*  
Volume 6 (July 2019)  
edited by Bradley Baurain & Michael Pasquale

The editors express their appreciation to all the referees who volunteered their time and expertise in reading, interacting with, and evaluating the manuscripts they received. We are also grateful for Michael Lessard-Clouston's layout and proofreading work on Vol. 6.

Typeset in Times New Roman

ISSN 2334-1866 (online)

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## About the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*

The *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* (*IJC&ELT*) is the official journal of the Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA, see <http://www.celea.net/>) and is supported by the Department of Applied Linguistics & TESOL at Biola University (<http://cook.biola.edu/programs/linguistics-tesol/>). It publishes articles and reviews related to English Language Teaching (ELT), with a perspective of particular interest to Christians, and specifically Christian English language educators. This journal is indexed in the Christian Periodicals Index (<http://cpi.acl.org/cpititles.html>).

The mandate of the *IJC&ELT* (ISSN 2334-1866, online) includes the following aims:

- to publish articles and reviews related to ELT, using a Christian perspective
- to stimulate the integration of the Christian faith and learning and teaching in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- to encourage and thus promote critical reflection, discussion, engaging theory, excellent research, and inspirational practice in applied linguistics and TESOL
- to provide an international approach to English language teaching and research
- to offer an open access forum that shares knowledge and applies high academic standards, including double blind peer review

As an international publication, the *IJC&ELT* recognizes that there are diverse Christian traditions and perspectives throughout the world and it therefore welcomes articles and reviews that deal with and address different Christian traditions and their connections to English language teaching. The main readership, however, is CELEA members, who themselves come from and bring a range of Christian perspectives to their work in ELT.

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## ***Information for Contributors***

### **Aims and Scope**

The *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* (ISSN 2334-1866, online) is an international peer reviewed open access journal that publishes quality empirical, practical, review, and theoretical papers covering a broad range of issues in English language teaching and research. *IJC&ELT* is thus an interdisciplinary forum, publishing both original research and teaching articles, as well as stimulating reflections and reviews of interest to Christians and others in TESOL. It aims to provide an international forum for established and emerging teachers, researchers, and others committed to ELT from a Christian point of view.

### **Audience**

The *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* is primarily intended for use in the academic community, especially for members of the Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA, see <http://www.celea.net/>), its sponsor. Yet *IJC&ELT*'s interdisciplinary nature also makes it accessible and of interest to educators of various types (including teacher trainers and those working with English language learners), curriculum developers and materials writers, Christian organizations concerned about language issues, and other interested practitioners, researchers, and theorists. Accordingly, the *IJC&ELT* is indexed in the Christian Periodicals Index (<http://cpi.acl.org/cpititles.html>).

### **Focus and Format**

With the above audience and policies below in mind, the focus of the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* is primarily on, though not restricted to, the following areas of inquiry, practice, and thinking in English language teaching:

- applied linguistics and language and culture learning and teaching
- classroom and other best practices in TESOL
- design and development of EFL/EIL/ELL/ESL/ESP curricula and materials
- ELT skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and methodologies
- innovations in teaching and learning English as a second/foreign language
- TESOL teacher education, research, and training
- theory and practice in second/foreign language learning and teaching

As an international publication whose primary audience is Christian English language educators and other interested parties, all contributions should approach the focus or topic at hand recognizing a Christian point of view, though readers realize that this may be more detailed or obvious in some cases and yet may appear less so in other instances. Submissions may be drawn from relevant presentations (CELT or other conferences, for example) or reflect classroom practices, research, or reviews of potential interest to *IJC&ELT* readers.

The journal includes four distinct sections:

*Articles* – reports of empirical studies, review papers or meta-analyses, theoretical position papers, etc. These should not exceed 7,000 words, including references.

*In the Classroom* – descriptions of teaching activities or techniques, classroom action research, etc., within a relevant theoretical framework, not to exceed 4,000 words.

*Forum* – position papers or reactions to articles or reviews, opinion or viewpoint articles, or reports, interviews, or commentary on current topics of interest. These submissions should also not exceed 4,000 words, including references.

*Reviews* – evaluative book, materials, and software reviews relevant to *IJC&ELT* readers. These will not usually exceed 1,500 words, including references.

## **Policies**

In order to reach the widest readership possible, the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* is published online through the *IJC&ELT* website (<https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/>), where editorials, articles, reviews, and other relevant communications are freely downloadable in the form of PDF files. CELEA members, libraries, or other readers may print out the complete issue file for themselves. If there is interest and demand, in the future we may offer hard copy issues through a print-on-demand publisher.

Given that the focus is English language teaching, the language of the journal is English. Initially the frequency of issues will be one per year, with the hope that this may increase, assuming a sufficient quantity of quality contents that pass blind peer review. Preference will be given to articles and reviews that make clear, helpful, and fresh contributions to the field of ELT within a Christian perspective, broadly conceived. Articles, advertisements, and reviews do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of the editors, editorial review board, or CELEA. Submissions may be made by readers around the world. Accepted papers and reviews will be approved by the editors and at least two additional readers, as appropriate for the *IJC&ELT* based on their contributions, originality, and relevance.

Articles and reviews shall conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA style, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Authors who publish in the *IJC&ELT* retain copyright of their work, enabling the unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction of their article or review in any medium, provided that they formally cite the original publication in the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*.

Manuscripts must not have been previously published or currently submitted for review at another journal. Authors should inform the editors if related research or a similar version of their manuscript has been published or is under consideration elsewhere. Authors will not be paid for articles or reviews; neither will they be charged publication fees. Authors, like readers, may freely download and print as many copies of their work in *IJC&ELT* as desired.

## **Submissions**

Contributions should be in the form of Word documents submitted as attached files at [IJCELT.Editors@gmail.com](mailto:IJCELT.Editors@gmail.com). Manuscripts which do not conform to the guidelines in the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2010) may not be sent for external review. The *IJC&ELT* welcomes articles from both native- and non-native English speakers, yet requests that ideas in submissions be expressed clearly for a broad, international audience. Authors are responsible for fluent language use, as well as for the accuracy of any data, references, or citations they incorporate into their work. Obtaining permission to incorporate any previously copyrighted material is the author's responsibility. The editors reserve the right to make minor editing changes without prior consultation with authors. Major editing or revisions, however, will only be done in consultation with authors.

Please see *IJC&ELT*'s website, <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/>, for the latest information about the journal. We value your contributions, prayers, and readership.





## **Editorial: It Takes a Village – Community and Language Learning**

**Michael Pasquale**

If one searches “learning communities” online, results range from institutional initiatives, shared academic goals, collaborative work, belonging, needs-fulfillment, emotional connection, shared events, etc. Purposes for learning communities range from academic achievement and student retention to success, skill-building opportunities, and greater access to resources, all of which present great opportunities for students (Otto, Evins, Boyer-Pennington, & Brinthaupt, 2015). While a friendly classroom environment is important, the significance of community in the classroom is more complex.

The church is also a learning community in that Christian discipleship does not happen without interpersonal relationships that involve deep care and concern for each other. Therefore, it seems that Christian educators would have a lot to say about educating in such a context (e.g., Smith, 2018). Learning communities in a Christian context would reflect, therefore, the kind of best-practice found in the church, that is, intentional interaction, trust and vulnerability, and ever-deepening relationships in which each person contributes his or her gifts for the benefit of the whole.

### **In This Issue**

Two feature articles in this issue focus on the influence of community in language learning and teaching. First, Aliel Cunningham, in her article “Envisioning Christian Presence and Practice in Online Teaching Contexts,” investigates the context of online learning and the importance of presence, for both teacher and student. Second, Carolyn Kristjánsson’s article “English Language Teaching: Locating Faith in the Context of Local and Global Dynamics” explores the concept of space and in turn its significant relation to identity and learning. These articles contribute to the conversation on learning communities by delving into these interconnected ideas of place, presence, and identity.

Additionally, several books are reviewed in this issue. R. Michael Medley reviewed the following books related to understanding the refugee crisis:

- *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*, by Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam Smeir.
- *Refugee*, by Alan Gratz.

- *Once We Were Strangers: What Friendship with a Syrian Refugee Taught Me about Loving My Neighbor*, by Shawn Smucker.

I reviewed the book *Thinking Theologically about Language Teaching: Christian Perspectives on an Educational Calling*, edited by Cheri L. Pierson and Will Bankston. Finally, the following books are also reviewed:

- *Spirituality and English Language Teaching: Religious Explorations of Teacher Identity, Pedagogy and Context*, edited by Mary Shepard Wong and Ahmar Mahboob. (Reviewed by Frank Tuzi)
- *Teaching English for Reconciliation: Pursuing Peace Through Transformed Relationships in Language Learning and Teaching*, by Jan Edwards Dormer and Cheryl Woelk. (Reviewed by Michael Westwood)
- *Theological English: An Advanced ESL Text for Students of Theology*, by Pierce Taylor Hibbs with Megan Reiley. (Reviewed by Jan Dormer)
- *Growing Up with God and Empire: A Postcolonial Analysis of 'Missionary Kid' Memoirs*, by Stephanie Vandrick. (Reviewed by Mary Shepard Wong)
- *Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission*, by James E. Plueddemann. (Reviewed by Timothy R. Sisk)

It has been a pleasure working with my co-editor, Bradley Baurain, and I am thankful for the work he has done to help craft this issue. I am also grateful for the work done by the founding editor of the journal, Michael Lessard-Clouston, on his valuable insight and diligent work in formatting the volume for publication. Thanks also to all of the reviewers for their time as they worked to make this edition a solid contribution to scholarly discourse. We continue to welcome input from readers and encourage submissions for the next volume. Soli Deo Gloria.

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## **Envisioning Christian Presence and Practice in Online Teaching Contexts**

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### **Abstract**

Sweeping changes across the landscape of higher education have made colleges and universities around the country and around the world reassess their mission and reevaluate their priorities. One paradigm shift that is affecting both Christian and non-Christian institutions alike is adjusting to how new technological platforms for course offerings are changing the way curriculum content is shared and interactions with others is mediated. This shift can be seen most readily in the almost universal trend toward offering more courses online either through blended learning or completely online program models. As this trend continues, Christian educators (especially those in ELT training or teaching) need to wrestle with how this change in the mode of instruction can open up new opportunities to teach in ways that are distinctly Christian and reflect the presence of Christ into a now virtual classroom. This article seeks to contribute to this conversation and prompt further discussion and shared reflection on this topic.

**Key words:** online education, Christian education, English language teaching, educational technology, blended learning

### **Introduction**

Online teaching is making its presence felt in nearly every institution of higher learning around the world. In the U.S. alone, the Babson Survey Research Group reported that the number of students taking online courses in the year 2015 had risen to over 6 million—that is, to one in every four students taking a course in higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2017). That number has been increasing steadily for the past 13 years and is on track to continue increasing for the foreseeable future (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Many students are routinely choosing online courses as a part of their undergraduate education and even more are selecting graduate programs that are entirely online. Along with this surge in demand for online classes, the survey also charts a precipitous drop in students attending classes only on campus—a drop of nearly one million students from 2012 to 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

In another more recent survey (2018) of major universities in the U.S. (“2018 Online Education Trends,” 2019), 99% of the schools reported that the demand for their online course offerings were either staying the same or were increasing, and about 40% of those universities

said they had plans to increase the budget for online education to keep up with the demand of students seeking to enroll (“Online Education Trends,” 2019). Kathleen S. Ives, the executive director of the Online Learning Consortium, commented on the larger impact that the growing demand for online education was having more globally: “The trend of increasing distance education enrollments in the face of declining overall higher ed enrollments suggests an important shift in the American higher education landscape, with contemporary learners leaning in to online options” (“Report: One in Four Students,” 2016).

The transition to this new paradigm of education, however, has not been a smooth and effortless one. For all its popularity among undergraduate students, university faculty have been hesitant to embrace online teaching with open arms. Some object to online education on the grounds that its true quality and effectiveness has not been well documented and others object to it on the basis of it being seen as a time-consuming and isolating experience for both students and instructors (King, 2002; Carnevale, 2004; Gudea, 2008).

My own experience with online education gave me an opportunity to assess these objections firsthand. I had been hearing about online courses for several years, but it wasn’t until about six years ago that I taught online for the first time. The course I taught was “Language Assessment” for an MA TESOL program at a Christian university. This experience allowed me to see the potential of online teaching as a platform for engaging students at a more personalized level than I was used to from my classroom experience. Instead of being an isolating experience, I found that online teaching could be both a quality experience and a bonding one between me and my students.

### **Lessons Learned through Online Teaching**

In that first experience of teaching online, I had inherited a course that was already fully designed and the cohort of the students in my class were more experienced with online learning than I was. This cohort was an intense group of high achievers who had a low tolerance for delayed communication, technological issues, or confusing organization of course content. In short, they had high expectations and taught me a great deal about the potential of online education. They typically wrote long, thought-provoking group discussion posts—analyzing each topic in careful detail, asking sharp questions, and including insightful and reflective (sometimes sarcastic) comments. Almost all of them asked for specific feedback on their

assignments on how they could improve their skills for the future and stayed very engaged throughout the course.

Even though I experienced a substantial learning curve and could understand why my colleagues in academia shied away from online teaching because of the extra effort and time it required, I found online teaching to be invigoratingly democratic. In a typical classroom setting, there are those students who engage with you readily and there are others who tend to hide in the background. In online teaching, however, I had a chance to know each student individually at a depth I did not typically enjoy in the classroom setting. I found that this new direct relationship with my students was worth the extra effort it took to learn a new rhythm of teaching and establishing “presence” in an online platform. This first demanding cohort won me over to the conviction that genuine learning and teaching were not only possible through a completely online program, but in many ways opened new avenues for learning and engaging with students. As Garrison (2017) points out, “The value of e-learning is as a catalyst to rethink its capacity to stimulate and guide the quest to personally construct meaning and collaboratively confirm knowledge” (p. 5).

### **The Question of Christian Practice**

Recognizing the potential embedded in online teaching contexts, I began to wrestle with the question of which practices would best utilize that potential for aims which were distinctively Christian. There are several secular studies related to how comfortable teachers feel with teaching online and what are potential “best practices” in online teaching (Gudea, 2008; Johnson, 2017; Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2018; Garrison, 2017). However, I have not seen any studies or thoughtful inquiries into the question that would most concern Christian educators—namely, what specific Christian practices and approaches would translate well into an online context. I was teaching online courses for Christian universities that took seriously the integration of faith as an essential part of learning. While I didn’t have specific guidelines for how this integration of faith translated from my face-to-face classroom experience into the radically different context framed by the online interface, I did have an online teaching mentor who supported me with both faith integration options and online teaching advice.

This question of what Christian presence could look like in an online context gained in urgency after reading the book *Desiring the Kingdom* by James K. A. Smith (2009) in which he

argues that all of our decisions (conscious and unconscious) as educators—from syllabus design to furniture arrangement—communicate underlying assumptions and have a formative effect on students. Bruner (1996) also points out that there are implications for each pedagogical choice made by the instructor:

Any choice of pedagogical practice implies a conception of the learner and may, in time, be adopted by him or her as the appropriate way of thinking about the learning process. For a choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. (p. 63)

### **Envisioning the Formation of an Online Christian Environment**

A quote that has been famously attributed to Aristotle says, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Examining the first half of this quote, it becomes obvious that almost any descriptive character trait could replace “excellence” and the quote would still hold true. It is not only “excellence” that is formed by habit but also every other facet of our character. The principle of establishing a new habit means that one must first break away from the old habits already in full force. The field of education in general and language teaching in particular is full of these habits—both good and bad—that have become so ingrained in the *modus operandi* that they no longer appear as unique structures or practices that could be changed or improved upon.

In his book, Smith (2009) discusses how higher education is formative in many profound ways that often go unnoticed or unexamined because they are embodied practices that have been inherited without much conscious thought or evaluation. He writes:

[E]ducation is not something that traffics primarily in abstract, disembodied ideas; rather, education is a holistic endeavor that involves the whole person, including our bodies, in a process of formation that aims our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world – all before we ever start *thinking* about it. (Smith, 2009, pp. 39-40)

This is something that, as an educator in the field of TESOL, I need to wrestle with on a regular basis, sifting through classroom practices and interaction structures to assess what habits of formation of heart and mind and body am I cultivating through the course I design. As the arbiter over the desired outcomes in the class, I make countless decisions (many of them unconscious decisions) about the timing of course material and student engagement, about setting and atmosphere, about types and quality of feedback and assignments, about the rubric of excellence

and expectations, about what is primarily important and what is the measure of “success” in the course. All of these decisions have profound and inherently formative impact on the students who experience the trajectory of my course.

Upon consideration of these factors, one question that inevitably arises is, “On what basis am I making these choices?” In other words, what are my guiding principles as I choose to structure my course in a certain way or choose to cultivate a certain atmosphere in my classroom? How much of my Christian understanding of how I relate to others as whole persons has informed my expectations of how I relate to my students or how I expect my students to relate to one another and their wider community? Smith (2009) argues that our template in higher education is often borrowed more from secular sources than explicitly Christian ones: “Many Christian schools, colleges, and universities—particularly in the Protestant tradition—have taken on board a picture of the human person that owes more to modernity and the Enlightenment than it does to the holistic vision of human persons” (p. 31).

So, it would seem that my first step toward truly envisioning what Christian presence and practice could look like in an online teaching context would be to take time to define what we mean by Christian presence and practice. What are the characteristics that set a Christian (or Christ-indwelling) approach to teaching apart from a secular one? What specific Christian practices or postures could be incorporated or emphasized which would increase the likelihood of the online students experiencing formation informed by the Christian truth embedded in these practices? Asking the question itself is a formative practice for Christian educators. There is no exhaustive answer, but it is a question to return to perennially.

While there is little published on this topic for specifically online contexts, there is a substantial body of literature which has mined this question when it comes to teaching in a traditional classroom. Two scholars who helped me think through this topic were David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith (2011), the editors of *Teaching and Christian Practices*. Thinking along with them there were several themes that began to emerge that were both relevant and translatable to online teaching. I will discuss these themes in broad terms and then discuss what these themes might look like in the particularity of teaching an online course. I have organized them into five themes which can be conceptualized as topics for ongoing conversation about the potential domains and intentional choices Christian online educators can make within those domains for communicating Christian presence and developing Christian practices in this

emerging field. The five themes are: Communicating Christian Presence, Cultivating Hospitality, Considering the Curriculum as Formative Practice, Creating Space for Community, and Connecting Personally.

### **Questions of the Heart**

Before delving into each of these themes in more detail, I want to address a few relevant questions as to the efficacy of this proposed endeavor. My aim in this article is not to write the final word on this topic of envisioning Christian presence in online education contexts. Indeed, so little is currently published on the topic that my hope is to encourage a robust conversation among Christian educators who see the opportunities this trend toward online education affords. Secondly, I recognize that some of the practices or recommendations I will discuss are not unique to a faith integration approach to online education, however, once we consider these practices from a Christian perspective, we can approach them in a uniquely Christian way. Lastly, I think it is important to consider that regardless of the practices we choose to integrate into our *modus operandi* when teaching online, I think the most important preparation is that of our heart attitude before God, which expresses an explicit reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide us as we prayerfully enter into the act of teaching online. This willingness to come to God empty with a dependent heart to be filled anew day by day is the heart of Christian presence, which will permeate every other interaction and decision that is made online. Without this, all the practices in the world will have little Christian presence or power. If we put our faith in “practices” rather than in God, we find ourselves suffering from the ailment that Paul diagnosed as having the form of godliness, but lacking the true essence of God’s presence and power (2 Timothy 3:5). As Gallagher (2017) points out in his own article on what it means to approach teaching from a Christian vantage point: “The creative act of the Spirit of illumination has lost its hold on intellect and heart... We give too much attention to method and machinery and resources and too little to the source of power” (pp. 139-140).

#### ***1. Communicating Christian Presence***

When researching what are the “best practices” recommended for online instructors in the current literature, the theme of “presence” comes up again and again. According to the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model (Garrison, 2017; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001) of online education, this aspect of presence is broken down into three main categories: 1) social



presence, 2) cognitive presence, and 3) teacher presence. Each of these is defined in terms of what each type of presence brings to the online learning experience and what needs to be “present” in order for it to effectively contribute to the course as a whole. For this theme, I want to unpack what Garrison (2017) refers to as “teacher presence.” He defines this as “the role and responsibility...to monitor and manage the transactional balance, and by engaging the learners, collaboratively guide the process of achieving worthwhile and intended learning outcomes in a timely manner” (p. 69).

Presence is a profound concept which can be framed in uniquely Christian terms (the deepest one being the Incarnation itself), but you don’t have to be a Christian to recognize that with all the conveniences that come with online education, one of the major detractors is the absence of a physical presence within the learning environment. There is a great deal of attention in the literature to overcoming this absence through a virtual sense of presence which allows for open communication, relationship-building, the establishment of rapport, and common purpose (Garrison, 2017). All of these are key aspects that make education what it is. Education without “presence” ceases to be education at all.

With all this emphasis put on presence the question arises, what would it mean for an online instructor to understand and communicate presence in a way that is uniquely Christian? One thing I believe that a Christian understanding of presence can contribute is the notion of purpose—that there is a reason for the ordering of things and there is a higher purpose being accomplished through our presence in the lives of our students and vice-versa. In the CoI framework, there is no category for “spiritual presence” or a concern for the soul or transcendental aims. As Smith and Carvill (2000) relate: “In his book *The End of Education*, Neil Postman laments the absence of direction and meaning in many schools today and stresses the importance of a ‘transcendental, spiritual idea that gives purpose and clarity to learning.’ Without an overarching teleology or narrative shaping education, Postman argues we lack ideals, purpose, continuity and hope for the future” (p. 102).

A Christian understanding of presence takes God’s sovereign presence in our lives as one of the first principles from which we operate. As Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” This deeper sense of presence can have implications for every aspect of the course—from what is included in curriculum to how students are welcomed and responded to, to the level of choice and autonomy that is given to the students

throughout the course—since it allows us to continually view our presence online as an opportunity to encounter one another within the narrative of God’s ongoing care and love for us. C. S. Lewis (2001) once said, “There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal” (p. 46).

Christian presence is always aware of the spiritual dimensions which run parallel to the physical. I think this is even more crucial to keep in mind for online teaching since the learner can feel cut off from the support of others when they lack the physicality of a classroom. When I make the introduction video for my class, I indicate that I will be praying for them and I invite prayer requests throughout the course. One of the reasons I do this is because even though I cannot be physically present with them, I want to establish from the beginning (as a part of the narrative within which we will be operating) that they are not alone in this endeavor. God is present with them and I affirm that truth through prayer.

This sacredness of presence is expressed as we prayerfully receive the unique gift of a student’s presence in the class and respond with the recognition that our online mediated interactions are not on a merely temporal plane but engaging with the souls of those whose story and journey the Holy Spirit is intimately acquainted with and can use the unique platform of online learning to engage us in heart and intellectual discussions that are personally relevant to each person present.

## ***2. Cultivating Hospitality***

Another theme that emerged was the Christian virtue of hospitality. This theme can be found in both Christian and secular sources discussing “best practices” for teaching online. Garrison (2017) uses the term “open communication” to refer to hospitable practices in online environments: “Open communication requires a climate of trust and acceptance that allows questioning while protecting self-esteem and acceptance in the community. Open communication is built through a process of recognizing, complimenting and responding to the question and contributions of others, thereby encouraging reflective participation and discourse” (p. 45). While there are some obvious differences between Christian hospitality and this description of open communication, there are several parallels here that can be practiced from a Christian perspective. Hospitality is mentioned several times in the New Testament as an expectation for all Christians to practice (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2). Christian

hospitality is based on the truth that we receive not only the opportunity to serve another as a gift from God, but also simply receive one another's presence as a unique (and sometimes surprising) gift from God.

Hospitality reaches out with goodwill to bless the other without expecting something in return. It is the gift of recognizing the other and our need for one another. As Smith and Carvill (2000) describe: "If we in these ways truly embrace the stranger, we will both rejoice and lament with him or her, and in so doing will become aware that we are part of a common, broken humanity. At the heart of hospitality is the embrace" (p. 102). Whether you are teaching for a Christian university or not, students immediately pick up on whether you have a genuine care for them as a student and have taken time to see them as a person or whether you are interacting with them in instrumental ways which simply check off the expected transactions within the structure of the course.

Some practical ways to practice hospitality in online courses are to provide a welcoming atmosphere in which the students have a forum to both get to know you and to know one another. This is sometimes done with a personal video or PowerPoint presentation of introduction. While most of the online course content is text-based, my students often commented on how important it was to hear my voice (either in audio or video format) or meeting others through videos posted near the start of the course. This willingness to go beyond the basics of a "text-only" medium to make our "teacher presence" felt through an audible word of welcome goes a long way to initiating and modeling the kind of community which supports student learning and grows us as people in caring relationship with one another.

Other ways an instructor can support a hospitable environment online include: investing time in responding to online forum discussion posts in a way that affirms student participation and encourages them to stay fully engaged; being thoughtful and supportive in feedback on various assignments; and responding to students' concerns or frustrations with a calm and understanding attitude, recognizing that the transition to online learning is usually a cultural as well as technical and logistical adjustment. One of the best ways to demonstrate hospitality is to have a clear and welcoming course design where expectations and assignments are detailed, easy to find, and thoughtfully put together. Also, one benefit to teaching online is the time the instructor has to prayerfully prepare responses to issues that come up during the class. Despite hours invested in course preparation, almost every online class will have its hiccups along the

way (technological or otherwise). However, when that happens I don't have to respond in the moment as I would in a face-to-face teaching context. I can use the often asynchronous nature of the online platform to ask for wisdom in my responses to students' difficulties or frustrations. In season and out of season, we are called to be godly hosts anticipating our students' needs and smoothing the way ahead of them.

### ***3. Considering the Curriculum as Formative Practice***

Teaching online requires an incredible amount of planning before the students ever show up for the course. This is true of most teaching, but it is particularly true in online teaching where there is ample opportunity for confusion or misunderstanding when students are trying for the first time to negotiate a new way of learning within an online course platform. Many students feel overwhelmed taking their first course online. Once the students get acclimated to their online environment, many of them begin to shift into a posture of ownership of the learning process and the curricular content with their individual goals in mind.

The content and design of the curriculum has been crafted with certain learning outcomes and aims in mind. These learning outcomes will vary depending on the institution offering the course, and online instructors have varying degrees of control over the content in the course they are teaching. Keeping these variations in mind, there are distinctly Christian ways of thinking about the curriculum that can be applied across the board.

One aspect of this is encapsulated in how we see our students. Envisioning a Christian perspective of our students would involve seeing them as people who make active choices within a context of social relationships, as creators who create and are made in the image of the Creator, and as formative spiritual beings whose hearts are shaped by what they love and what they practice. Each of these Christian ways of seeing students has implications for how the course content and requisite assignments can be defined and designed. For example, when we see students as active, relational beings rather than passive recipients of knowledge, then it becomes clear that there needs to be opportunities for relational engagement within a social forum. Another implication would be including options for student choice and co-creation in the assignments or other aspects of the course design. This again may not be a specifically "Christian" pedagogical principle, but honors the student as a person created in God's image to be a co-creator. Considering why we design our curriculum in a given way is just as important as

the resulting outcome. Smith (2009) defines education in these terms: “An education, then, is a constellation of practices, rituals, and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices” (p. 26). He goes on to describe how this is not unique to Christian education, but all education is essentially formative—the question is simply what kind of formation? What is the overarching vision of success, wholeness or flourishing?

If this is the case, then the designing of what the students will “practice” over the duration of the course has rich potential for reflecting priorities that come from a Christian understanding of what would promote flourishing in our students’ lives as well as the worlds they inhabit. What I am suggesting here are not simple techniques that can be applied easily or quickly integrated into a course, but they are opportunities for thinking deeply about what kinds of assignments and practices the students are routinely asked to complete and questioning whether the design is informed by desired outcomes grounded in a Christian framework.

Both Smith and Smith (2011) have done a lot of thinking about this very question in their edited volume on *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*. In this volume there are several examples of Christian educators wrestling with this very question and discovering different answers. In a case study presented by Smith (2011), he presents intentional ways in which he shaped the design of the task for the course content in ways that were simultaneously embedded within Christian reflective practices. One example he gives is of an assignment in which he tells his students: “Find an undisturbed spot and, notebook in hand, meditate in silence for at least an hour on one of the texts studied. Then meet with two other students, discuss the insights gained, and write up a summary of the conversation” (p. 56). Another example was, “Think of a thoughtful Christian friend and write him or her a five-page letter explaining how a close reading of one the texts studied could positively impact his or her life” (p. 56).

Several of Smith’s examples, in that chapter and in other works (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2007), include assignments in which students are expected to interact with someone in their community or their family and involve them in the learning process. This element of including the students’ community in their learning process has its basis in recognizing a Christian truth that we learn best when we serve and edify others with our knowledge.

This is a paradigmatic shift away from the individual-focused models that Western education tends to bring to curriculum design, assessment options, and assignment descriptions. While it may take time to sift through our own educational norms of reference, it is worth taking inventory of our default structures and assignments to see whether or not they reflect a Christian way of viewing the world. These embedded priorities are not unique to Christian education. Smith (2009) argues that all educators' choices communicate a set of priorities and beliefs: "Behind the veneer of a 'value-free' education concerned with providing skills, knowledge, and information is an educational vision that remains formative. There is no neutral, nonformative education; in short, there is no such thing as a 'secular' education" (p. 26).

One example from my own experience when teaching an online course about English as an International Language (EIL) was to design a reflection paper in which the students had to find a place in their city where they would be "the stranger" (the one who didn't fit in or didn't know the rules or expectations of that particular community) and try to join the community and see what response they received. The assignment asks questions about whether they were welcomed or not, about what actually happened during the interaction and what they wished would have happened, and about how this experience changed their own perspective of those deemed "outsiders" from their own community's perspective. This embodied experience always provides rich food for thought for the students and it is often commented on as their favorite assignment throughout the course. However, asking students to be this vulnerable with their lives and their experiences requires a level of trust—not only between the student and instructor, but also within the larger community of the class.

#### ***4. Creating Space for Community***

We are made for community. Social community is God's intentional design for us to learn truth and grow into maturity within a relationally rich and meaningful context. This relational aspect of online learning may not be high on the students' list of priorities when they initially choose an online course, but it is an essential component to the students' success. A biblical understanding of community emphasizes not only the need for social network and support, but also the recognition that we are responsible to and for one another (Hebrews 10:22-25; Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). This is a key component needed for success in online education since it can often be a lonely journey if you do not have the support of your peers



cheering you on. Establishing relational ties with peers who are pursuing similar goals helps the individual student stay engaged and motivated in an otherwise solitary activity that may or may not have direct application to the rest of their daily life. This understanding of the optimal conditions for learning is reiterated by Garrison (2017) describing the CoI model of online learning: “We never learn in isolation. It is an illusion, a mistaken belief, which makes us think that we are self-directed learners—that we think and learn as individuals. The reality is that we cannot avoid being influenced by our environment” (p. 11).

When I started teaching online, I soon realized that my students did not have the same opportunities for a sense of community to naturally develop as they would in face-to-face contexts since they were often logging into the course from five different time zones and coming into the course with specific cultural expectations, daily schedules, and life pressures. With all of these inherent differences the students need a common sense of purpose and membership to help create a natural bond to one another. Garrison (2017) refers to this critical bond in e-learning: “Group cohesion and association is taken to the next level by using the inclusive pronouns such as ‘we and ‘our.’ It is cohesion that helps sustain the commitment and focus of a community of inquiry, particularly in an online learning group” (p. 46). He goes on to describe how this formation of a group identity is key to developing a sense of belonging and shared purpose for online students.

One way that we can promote a sense of group cohesion is to encourage the students to form their own Facebook group (or similar social media closed group) where they can get to know one another outside of the confines of the online platform. Another way to promote a sense of community is to provide for an opportunity near the start of the course for personal introductions and ask them to choose a group leader to be in communication with the instructor when there are issues that arise with the course. Once students have a strong sense of being a stakeholder within the larger learning community then they begin to take ownership not only for their own learning, but also for the learning of others within the group.

I try to have at least one consistent practice or assignment which the students have to complete in collaborative ways each week. I also encourage authentic communication between the group members so that once the bonds of trust and familiarity are established they can practice speaking truth to one another in love and checking in with each other when they notice an individual’s absence that week.

One advantage that Gudea (2008) noted about group dynamics online is that the distance between the participants can give space and protection in ways that can embolden shy students to engage in a discussion they might have opted out of had it been in a classroom setting which favors the more extraverted student. One fascinating thing about any cohort is that you have students engaging together who would not likely be friends or peers in any other setting. However, when they are bonded together through a common goal it can become a powerful incentive to “not let the group down.” In one cohort of online learners who really took this principle to heart and formed their own Facebook page to stay connected beyond the borders of the online platform, I saw them live out this picture of community. They all faced personal struggles as they went through the MA online program, but through weekly meetings together as a cohort, prayers for one another, encouragement not to quit (they even formulated a cohort motto: “Start together. Finish together.”), this cohesive group of students from very different ages and ethnic and educational backgrounds became a community with the goal of caring for one another until they could all graduate together.

### ***5. Connecting Personally with Students’ Needs, Goals, and Expectations***

The last theme I will address is probably the best and most logical place for envisioning Christian presence and practice within the context of personal relationships with students. One practical application of offering this in an online context rather than in a face-to-face context is that the individualized instruction also allows for a more personal interaction between student and instructor in which they don’t have to voice their concerns or struggles in a public arena or in front of strangers. This individualized communication allows me to respond to their needs in a timely and personal manner and gives me an opportunity to build rapport and relationship with each student at the point of their felt need—both academically as well as emotionally and spiritually.

The Scriptures have much to say on the topic of caring for your neighbor, but the metaphor that I find most helpful from the instructor’s point of view is that of the good shepherd. The scriptural image of a shepherd for teachers is found in both the Old Testament and the New. The shepherd takes an interest in each sheep and takes note if any sheep are missing or ailing or heading in the wrong direction. Some of the most wide-open doors I have had for sharing my faith during my time as an online instructor have been through continual personal care and

connection for individual students. This is obviously harder to do when you have a large class size, but there still seem to be those particular students who need a little extra attention, extra words of encouragement, or extra time to listen to their struggles or concerns. This willingness to be available above and beyond my contractual duties builds trust between me and my students and their initial defenses begin to lower as they share more about their lives and their particular goals and struggles. Though these students also often take extra emotional and physical energy throughout the course, I find that they are the ones who make my online teaching experience richer and more worthwhile when I see the transformation that God is doing in their lives and my own through this experience of sharing connection and vulnerability together. I include this as a Christian distinctive because I know I could not engage (and probably would not choose to engage) with these students in the same compassionate and healthy way if I did not recognize my own frailties and dependence on God first. I know it is only by the Holy Spirit's leading and the love and life of Christ through me that meet these students' needs in deeply transformative ways, and it is the online platform that allows me the extra space to focus on each one individually and engage them on a personal level.

## **Conclusion**

After reviewing these five themes, I am very aware that this article merely brushes the surface of all that could be discussed on this topic, but I hope that these preliminary thoughts will engender much needed discussion and dialogue for what our vision as Christian educators should include when teaching online. Some questions that should be addressed in future conversations are: 1) What are ways that teaching online within Christian institutions could be different from non-Christian institutions? 2) In what ways can assessment and feedback play a role in communicating Christian presence and practices? and 3) In what ways is the current model of online education at odds with a Christian understanding of growth and learning and are there ways to transform the current template of online learning?

In closing, I would say that I believe online education is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Someone will be given the responsibility for teaching this growing number of online students. I believe we can teach online in ways that set us apart as Christian educators and instructors, but thoughtful discussion is needed to design online courses that truly reflect Christian principles and priorities rather than taking as a given the default template handed to us.

As we continue to wrestle with how can we be salt and light through this new medium of education, I believe that we can take the educational tools that are being utilized in today's technologically saturated world and use them in ways that bring glory to God and encounters of God's grace to our students.

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## **English Language Teaching: Locating Faith in the Context of Local and Global Dynamics**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to contribute to an understanding of the presence and outworking of Christian faith in the teaching and learning of English in the context of interconnected local and global dynamics. The pursuit is informed by conceptualizations of space as social text along with links to agency and identity. This frames the examination of classroom interaction data gathered in a community-based, volunteer-run, church-sponsored English as a Second Language program for adult newcomers to Canada. Classroom discourse and interaction are also considered with reference to interview comments made by program providers to gain insight into the significance they attach to their actions. This gives rise to the proposal that faith-informed dimensions of identity and ideological space at broad levels have implications for constructions of space in the localized dynamics of teaching and learning. The results and discussion make a case for the simultaneity of local and global ways of being in the world and an understanding of the construction of space not only as social text but, in this case, also spiritual text informed and animated by sacred text. The article concludes by considering how matters raised in the study might be relevant to Christian English language educators and researchers in other contexts.

**Key words:** English language teaching, church-based ESL, adult language education, space, agency, identity, classroom dynamics

The use of spatial metaphors can be found across a range of academic disciplines. In many cases terms such as *place*, *boundaries*, *borders*, *margins*, *location*, and *context* entail an understanding of space as produced by human activity in contrast to views of space as an empty container in which social life simply unfolds, (e.g., Canagarajah, 2005; Edwards & Usher, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Massey, 2005; Mizzi, 2013; Morgan, 2000; Wilson, Ek, & Douglas, 2014). In this article I wish to explore the space of English language teaching and learning and how faith values, including spiritual values from a Christian perspective, might come to bear on the understanding and structuring of this space. Morgan (2000) calls for an interpretation of space as social text. In his view, spaces are made in the living of our lives, a perspective that has implications for educational contexts. In this article I take the position that space can additionally

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<sup>1</sup> I come to this study as a Christian researcher with a personal history of transnational migration.



be understood as spiritual text, also made in the living of our lives. Furthermore, I suggest that this perspective can likewise illuminate an understanding of educational spaces, not least, the space of English language teaching and learning.

In what follows, I begin by discussing the construct of *space* along with links to *agency* and *identity* before presenting and examining a set of interrelated excerpts of classroom interaction from a specific teaching and learning space, a community-based, volunteer-run, church-sponsored English as a Second Language (ESL) program for adult newcomers to Canada. I then consider the significance of this classroom interaction with reference to accounts of program providers to gain insight into the understandings they attach to their actions. In light of their comments, I suggest that faith-informed dimensions of identity and ideological space at broad levels have implications for constructions of space in the localized dynamics of teaching and learning. I elaborate by expanding on metaphors that emerge in the accounts of stakeholders and end with some thoughts on how the matters raised in this paper might be relevant to Christian English language teachers in other contexts.

## **Clarifying Constructs**

### ***Making Sense of Space***

Conceptualizations of space, often held implicitly, are of great consequence for the way we order the world and position ourselves and others (Massey, 2005). In making the case for a spatial paradigm that transcends that of neutral arena or empty container, Massey (2005) advances three propositions. First, she proposes that space be understood as the product of interactions that range from the “intimately tiny” to “the immensity of the global” (p. 9); second, that it be recognized as a sphere constituted by “coexisting heterogeneity” (p. 9), that is, the co-existence of distinct trajectories, and third, that it be viewed as always under construction, “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (p. 9). Such an understanding of space has implications not only for the production and reproduction of social relationships, but also for possibilities of inclusion and exclusion (Morgan, 2000). From this vantage point, space may further be understood as potentially enabling or constraining, “filled with power and ideology at all scales from the body to the global” (p. 281). Applied to educational spaces, it is an understanding that challenges the notion of classrooms as neutral containers for curriculum and pedagogy, considering instead how

“curriculum and pedagogy are moored and bounded together through particular enactments and gatherings of relations” (Edwards, Tracy, & Jordan, 2011, p. 273).

This is a position consistent with claims advanced by Cummins (2000, 2009), who asserts that pedagogical space in the classroom is created through the micro-interactions of participant stakeholders which cannot be understood apart from macro-interactions constitutive of the wider social space beyond. Furthermore, he holds that interactions between stakeholders at any level can be characterized in terms of power relations ranging along a continuum from coercive to collaborative. Whereas the former represents power exercised by dominant stakeholders to the disadvantage of those in less powerful positions, the latter represents collaborative power creation generated through joint interaction that amplifies the capacities and opportunities of participants. According to Cummins (2009), the micro-interaction between educators, students, and the communities they represent form an interpersonal space wherein knowledge acquisition and identity formation are negotiated (p. 263). Regardless of the external constraints that come to bear on pedagogical spaces within classrooms, Cummins asserts that educators always have some degree of choice in how they orchestrate classroom interactions and that the choice represents pedagogical opportunity as well as ethical responsibility (p. 262).

### ***Agency***

This raises the question of agency. Seen from a socio-dynamic paradigm, agency may be understood as a person’s capacity to act within the possibilities afforded by surrounding social structures (van Lier, 2008) while not necessarily being determined by them (Gao, 2007; Kristjánsson, 2013a).

More specifically,

Agency refers to people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals... Agency can also enable people to actively resist certain behaviors, practices, or positionings, sometimes leading to oppositional stances and behaviors leading to other identities. (Duff, 2012, p. 417)

Put differently, agency can be understood as a complex dynamic system in which people interact with their environments in an ongoing co-constitutive relationship (Mercer, 2011). As such, in addition to action or performance, agency includes the dynamics of meaning and interpretation, encompassing the ability to ascribe relevance and significance to things and events, including agentive behaviour itself (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Miller, 2010; van Lier, 2008; Yang, 2013). It

can thus be understood as a dynamic property constructed through participation in activity, accounting also for the diversity of relevance and significance attributed to participation in the same activity by different individuals (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 239). From this vantage point, in the most succinct of terms, agency can be summed up as *meaningful* action (Arnold & Murphey, 2013).

At the centre of any discussion of meaningful action in the classroom lies the ethical dimension of teacher choices noted earlier. Cummins (2009), like others (e.g., Hafernik, Messerschmitt, & Vandrick, 2002), uses the term to encompass elements that can more closely be defined by distinguishing between ethics and morality. As set forth by Johnston (2003), ethics pertains to the codified standards and rules governing professional conduct, while morality involves personal values and beliefs that cannot be regulated by institutions, but play a significant role in teaching and are inextricably linked to teacher identity (p. 11). Johnston further observes that religious persuasions are among the most profoundly significant parts of identity for many people and, not uncommonly, form the foundation for any discussion of values in language teaching (p. 112). This gives rise to his claim that an understanding of the complex moral space of ELT is incomplete without some consideration of how such foundational beliefs might come to bear on the practices of educators.

Johnston is not alone in his position. Christian scholars have, for centuries, explored the connection between Christian faith and education (Wong, 2014). In the professional conversations of mainstream ELT, during the past several decades, discussions of spirituality and religion, once rare, have begun to emerge with increasing frequency. These include diverse published perspectives on the interface of ELT and Christian faith (e.g., Edge, 1996, 1996-1997; 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Phillipson, 1992; Purgason, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2007; Stevick, 1990, 1996-1997; Wong & Canagarajah, 2009), along with the gradual emergence of empirical studies and discussion of potential research directions encompassing Christian faith (e.g., Baurain, 2015; Han, 2009; Han & Varghese 2019; Varghese & Johnston, 2007; Wong, Kristjánsson, & Dörnyei, 2013; Wong & Mahboob, 2018), and a recent articulate call for the establishment of a subfield in applied linguistics that focuses on religion and language teaching and learning (Han, 2018). One focal point in this discussion is the role of faith in Christian teachers' understanding of their identity (e.g., Pasquale, 2013; Wang-McGrath, 2013; Wong, 2009, 2013) and the implications this might have for teaching as well as student experience in

the complex socio-dynamic relations between stakeholder identities, motivation, and agency in classroom interaction (Baurain, 2013; Chan, 2013; Ding, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Kim, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2013a, 2018; Kubanyiova, 2013; Lessard-Clouston, 2013; Smith, 2013; Snow, 2013).

### ***Identity***

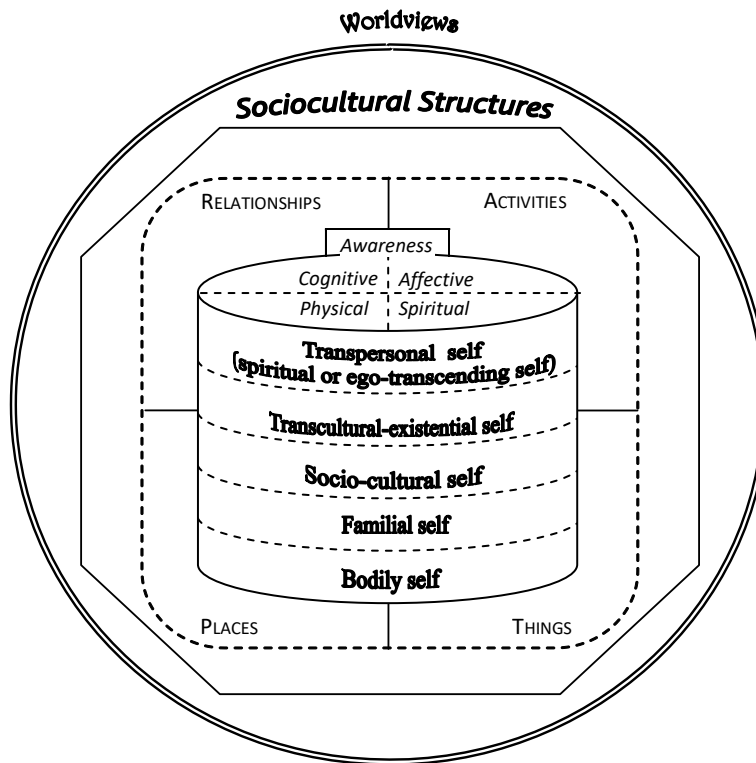
Norton (2000) describes identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). The dynamic and complex nature of interrelationships coming to bear on the spaces of ELT can be helpfully illuminated further with reference to the work of Ishiyama (1995a), who sees human interaction as motivated by a need for self-validation. Within this paradigm, self-validation is the “affirmation of one’s sense of self, purpose in life, and meaningful personal existence in a given sociocultural context” (Ishiyama & Kitayama, 1994, p. 168), a process often mediated in and through language (Ishiyama, 1995b). Self, in this view, is represented as a multidimensional construct consisting of five elements: physical, or *bodily self* (the body and physical aspects of being), *familial self* (family roles and relationships), *sociocultural self* (social and cultural roles and relationships outside the family context), *transcultural-existential self* (the existential aspect of self capable of relating to others at a level beyond the restrictions of sociocultural norms or externally imposed values), and *transpersonal self* (the spiritual or ego-transcending aspect of self) (Ishiyama, 1995a). These interrelated dimensions are co-occurring, fluid, and holistic.

I also suggest that the way in which an individual personally experiences or assigns significance to a particular dimension of self at any given time will draw on *physical*, *cognitive*, *affective*, and/or *spiritual* awarenesses and capacities (Kristjánsson, 2010, 2013a). From this perspective, identities are formed and validated or invalidated around the five basic dimensions of self in various contexts, or spaces, of human existence. These interactive spheres of existence can be conceptualized in terms of four overlapping domains: interpersonal *relationships*, *activities*, symbolic and practical objects or *things*, and *places* or landmarks (Ishiyama, 1995a). In my understanding (Kristjánsson, 2010), the domains do not exist in a vacuum, but are located within a constellation of interrelated *sociocultural structures* such as government, educational institutions, organized religion, and kinship structures, to name a few. They encompass relations

of power and are themselves situated in broader orientations toward the world which include, but are not limited to, cultural and ideological frames, represented by the term *worldviews*.

Worldviews come to bear on how all aspects are understood and interpreted in constructing identities for self and positioning others at any given point in time and space. This is depicted in the diagram below of multidimensional identity, situated in the interrelationships of multiple dynamic interconnected systems (Kristjánsson, 2013a).

Figure 1. *Situated Multidimensional Identity* (Kristjánsson, 2013a, p. 13)



## **Pedagogical and Interpersonal Space: Glimpses of Classroom (Inter)Action**

### ***The Practices of Teaching and Learning***

Kubanyiova (2013) has observed that one of the most notable features of research on Christian educators is “an almost exclusive empirical focus on ‘narrated’ as opposed to ‘enacted’ identities” (p. 90). She urges researchers to move beyond reliance on anecdotal evidence and incorporate richer descriptions by examining teachers’ practices, evidenced through classroom discourse patterns and general interactions with students, among other things (p. 90). With this injunction in mind, I would like to consider two sets of classroom interaction, drawing

substantially on the words of participants so that their voices are not obscured by my own. The excerpts to be examined occurred at a three-week interval in the same class and are taken from a study conducted in a volunteer-run, church-based language program for adults in Canada (Kristjánsson, 2013a).

An important feature of the program was an activity known as “What did you do on the weekend?” which took place during the first part of the first class each week and appeared regularly in my video-recordings of classroom interaction. During this activity, students at all levels were given an opportunity to talk about something they had done or experienced over the weekend and it was not uncommon for classes to spend up to 90 minutes, or 25% of weekly class time, engaged in this exercise. While these sessions were often characterized by accounts of routine occurrences and lighthearted moments of teasing and joking, there were also times when students chose to disclose matters that were serious in nature and of deep personal significance.

Such an instance occurred one winter morning in an intermediate class of female students comprised of immigrant women and mothers of visa students, many alone with their children in Canada. On this day, 14 Taiwanese and Korean women were present along with the female Canadian born teacher, herself the daughter of European immigrants. The class began with a Taiwanese student describing the death of a 33-year-old cousin from cancer. The next student told of her aging father’s baptism in a hospital in Taiwan. A third student spoke of her husband’s return to Korea for another three months and her son’s inconsolable grief. The fourth student, Juling, a Taiwanese woman, began by saying that she had not been well over the weekend, linking her condition to interrelated physical and emotional causes. When the teacher attributed this to missing her husband, who was in Taiwan, Juling rejected the explanation. In her view, it was due to lack of good friends and her recourse had been to pray.

---

**Week 1:1**

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Juling: Last week I’m very sad because I feel uncomfortable. I have some runny nose...and cough and I feel very lonely.  
Teacher: Oh, you miss your husband  
Juling: No, because I came to here and haven’t good friend [fights tears] and so I pray.

---

Amid offers of support and friendship from others in the class, Juling told how she had called an immigrant acquaintance who had also initially experienced physical illness in Canada which she linked to loneliness.



**Week 1:2**

---

Juling: I called a friend. I'm very lonely [wipes a tear from one eye]. So she introduced a woman, when she immigrate to here, she hardly get disease.

---

Seeking to better understand what Juling was saying, the teacher sought clarification while other students offered nonverbal support.

**Week 1:3**

---

Teacher: She hardly?  
Juling: Yeah, because  
Teacher: Just a minute. Say that again. She hardly what?  
Juling: She hardly get disease [wipes a tear from the other eye]. [Li Fen comes with Kleenex, puts it in her hand as she talks and hugs her from behind while Juling continues talking with T.]  
Teacher: She gets the disease or she hardly does?  
Juling: Yes  
Teacher: That means she never does? She's usually healthy?  
Juling: Yes  
Teacher: Okay

---

Juling continued. Now that the acquaintance had friends, this was no longer a problem. She reported that the woman had given her advice on how to make friends, but that she felt she still did not know what to do and so she had prayed once again.

**Week 1:4**

---

Juling: She say she has the same experience with me.  
Teacher: So you always get, like, ah, colds? Do you usually get colds and allergies? Is that what you have?  
Juling: [Nods and wipes eyes with Kleenex] The friend, she told me many experience move here. And now she is very exciting in her life so she just talk me much about how to get friends in here.  
Teacher: That was good.  
Juling: But I don't know [how to get friends]. I prayed. God answer me.

---

Juling went on to tell how she had subsequently received phone calls from several friends who lived at a distance and that neighbors had also dropped by for a visit. When the teacher echoed Juling's earlier assertion that it was an answer to her prayer, she agreed, reiterating her view of the impetus for the chain of events.

---

**Week 1:5**

---

Juling: Because I prayed, “God, I’m very lonely” and he [gestures to self] me.  
Teacher: Yeah, he brought you some hope.  
Juling: [Nods head]  
Teacher: Good.

---

The teacher then extended the conversation by observing that everyone, including herself, faced loneliness at times. She went on elaborate, broadening the conversation by elevating Juling’s account from an individual experience to one shared by many. While others in the class continued to show empathy and support for Juling, the teacher highlighted the group’s shared need of each other.

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**Week 1:6**

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Teacher: Women need each other. We need to talk, and I know for lots of you it must be very hard... [Juling wipes eyes] That’s wonderful. God answered your prayer. [Juling continues to wipe eyes. Jia Li wipes the corners of her eyes. Jinhee puts an arm around Juling.]  
Mi-Hye: You have very good friends here. [Li Fen walks over with more Kleenex and pats Juling comfortingly on the shoulders]  
Teacher: You know that we all care about you.

---

At this point Jinhee, a Korean student, spoke up with the teacher and another Korean student joining in, all three deploying humor to facilitate a serious discussion of loneliness and depression:

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**Week 1:7**

---

Jinhee: Early morning I receive a call from my husband. Suddenly, why I cried? I don’t know.  
Teacher: Because you missed him! [General Laughter]  
Jinhee: I’m not missing him. Just a little bit. [General laughter; Jinhee laughs]  
Teacher: [Acts as if phoning] But all of a sudden you hear his voice and then you really miss him!  
Mi-Hye: My husband always with me, but I sometimes will cry too. [General laughter]  
Yeah. Not husband! [General laughter] ...  
Jinhee: Sometimes my feeling is low. I am crying. My husband really worry about me. He say, “Why you crying?” So I answer  
Mi-Hye: “I need you” [Much general laughter]  
Teacher: “I need you!” [More general laughter]  
Mi-Hye: “Right now.”  
Teacher: Yeah, “Right now! Come home!”

Jinhee: [Mimics her husband] “I think that you catch some cold?” I, “Yes,” but I’m not catch cold. [laughs]  
Teacher: You just said you did. ...

---

Jinhee finished her remarks by stating that when in Canada, unlike in Korea, she too sometimes experienced the feelings described by Juling. The teacher then turned to Juling and affirmed her once more for making the disclosure, noting the benefit of becoming aware that she wasn’t alone in this experience. Two other students added their thoughts, picking up on the theme of strength implied by Jinhee’s account of allowing her husband to think she had a cold. They also returned to the theme of loneliness and the potential for greater strength in mutual support, interaction facilitated by the teacher.

---

#### **Week 1:8**

Yu-Jeong: Now I think it is time to test myself, to [be] strong.  
Teacher: Oh yeah...it’s a testing time.  
Various: Yeah  
Yu-Jeong: [To Juling] Everyone is difficult, are difficult, live here.  
Yun Jin: You have to stand alone.  
Teacher: And I remember, Mi-Hye, when you were in my class at first. You said, “I always have a headache [general laughter] to think about all these words.”  
Mi-Hye: [Nods head] Yeah  
Teacher: ...there are so many adjustments.  
Yu-Jeong: ...Because we feel alone, lonely. Try to share, share together. [Gestures to include class]

---

Juling responded to Yu-Jeong’s comment by elaborating further on the cause of her loneliness, missing the Lunar New Year celebration in Taiwan.

---

#### **Week 1:9**

Juling: In Taiwan, there Lunar New Year. The company have a special dinner with the staff. Every year I have this special dinner, but this year I haven’t.

---

This sparked an exchange, initiated by Jinhee and supported by the teacher, regarding special holidays and the loneliness people feel when separated from loved ones at such times. At the end, the teacher again thanked Juling for her contribution. Juling responded with an apology, an action met with protests from the teacher and other students.

**Week 1:10**

---

Teacher: Don't be sorry!  
Various: Don't be sorry!  
Jinhee: Don't be sorry [Gestures with hand to indicate "No"]  
Teacher: No, it's very good. ...you feel better when you talk about it and find out that others feel the same thing.

---

Yalin, a Taiwanese student, then offered to help Juling make contact with other Chinese in the church community to which she belonged. This was followed by more comments of affirmation and support, and a final observation by Jinhee that listening to Juling's story had caused those in the class to feel closer. The teacher agreed, bringing this part of the activity to an end.

However, that was not the end of Juling's story. Three weeks later the mood was very different during the "What did you do on the weekend?" activity as students talked about their weekends in small groups. Juling had been busy. Among other things, that weekend an art club had been started in her home, facilitated by Yalin, who had arranged for an art teacher through her contacts. A number of women in the English class had been there with their children and were learning to draw. After a time of animated group interaction, the teacher called the class together and each student took a turn reporting on the activities of another person in their group. Juling's group had the floor and Jinhee was attempting give the class a report of Juling's weekend, but with such enthusiastic support from Yu-Jeong, a generally more proficient speaker of English, that Jinhee's opportunity to speak was being limited. The teacher stepped in, both complimenting Yu-Jeong on her English language ability and creating space for Jinhee, whose attention had been drawn to Yu-Jeong's word choice.

**Week 3:1**

---

Yu-Jeong: Teacher taught her...to draw a picture.  
Teacher: Oh.  
Jinhee: [To Juling] Draw a picture?  
Yu-Jeong: Yeah  
Teacher: Okay, okay, okay. This is what I want. I want Jinhee to try to explain, because you're very good, Yu-Jeong. [General laughter] You're very good, but I want Jinhee to try [More laughter]. [To Jinhee] Then you get better! [Continued laughter]  
Jinhee: Anyway Juling and her friend, four ladies  
Teacher: Yes, there's four ladies  
Jinhee: came to Juling's house. And then their teacher is a man, teach, taught them take a picture.

---

The teacher, noting Jinhee's choice of "take" over "draw", probed this aspect further in a brief exchange.

---

**Week 3:2**

Teacher: Draw a picture?  
Yu-Jeong: Draw a picture.  
Jinhee: Draw a picture!  
Teacher: What's take a picture? What's take a picture?  
Students: [Make motions of taking a picture with a camera or point to the video camera]  
Teacher: Camera, yeah.

---

Jinhee then concluded her account, followed by another brief exchange in which the teacher complimented her on her language use and others verified their understanding of the related verb tense:

---

**Week 3:3**

Jinhee: Anyway, she had a good time! [General laughter]  
Teacher: That's good. You did a good, a good job. Very good.  
Jinhee: Thank you  
Various: [Echo] taught  
Teacher: Taught, t-a-u-g-h-t [Spells word]  
Jinhee: Past?  
Teacher: Teaching. Past tense.

---

Following a few more exchanges in which the teacher asked Juling more about the art club, Juling emphatically stated that the pictures drawn by participants' children were beautiful, and at the teacher's request, those involved promised to bring the drawings next class for others to see. The discussion continued with Yu-Jeong reiterating Juling's busyness, further noting that she and Juling had also gone to the local swimming pool together on the weekend.

Soon after it was Juling's turn to recount another student's weekend experience. As she searched for words to begin, the report turned into a co-constructed account in which those present deliberately played with language, simultaneously joking and expressing an important message about themselves and their appreciation for each other.

---

**Week 3:4**

Juling: Li Fen's family last Saturday went to a group of [makes circular motion with hands searching for words], went to a friend [makes gestures, still searching for words], a group of [makes a face, still searching for words]

Teacher: Right  
Li Fen: Beautiful women cooking meeting.  
Juling: Cooking meeting  
Teacher: A? A?  
Juling: Beautiful women cooking, but [General laughter]  
Teacher: Beautiful women?  
Juling: Cooking meeting

---

Admittedly confused, the teacher sought clarification, which led to another collaboratively constructed explanation:

### **Week 3:5**

---

Teacher: Okay, hold on. I'm confused here. [General laughter] Li Fen, you went to somebody's house?  
Juling: Yes  
Teacher: And they taught you how to cook there?  
Li Fen: Yeah  
Teacher: A Canadian home?  
Li Fen: No. Chinese.  
Teacher: A Chinese home.  
Juling: Because Chinese Lunar, Autumn Moon Festival, we have special cookies... so a member taught them how to make special cookies.

---

This prompted a request from students, repeated by the teacher, that samples of the “special cookies” be brought next class along with the pictures. Li Fen promised she would try. Suddenly Jinhee made a pivotal and emphatic statement, drawing attention to what she considered to be an underappreciated but highly significant point, the description of the Asian women who had been in attendance. This was immediately reiterated by Li Fen and taken up by the teacher:

### **Week 3:6**

---

Jinhee: What Li Fen say is, it is important thing, is the group is BEAUTIFUL LADIES GROUP  
Various: Oh! ...  
Li Fen: All women beautiful!  
Teacher: Ooohhh! [Much laughter]  
Li Fen: Beautiful women cooking meeting.  
Teacher: Oh, all beautiful women were there. [Much laughter] Of course, look at how beautiful Li Fen is.

---

At this, Juling added her own observation, and with understanding enhanced by recent acts of friendship, re-directed the appraisal to those present. Her comment was underscored by Li Fen and taken up by the teacher. It was also enthusiastically echoed by others and extended to the teacher in a moment of palpable appreciation for the deeper significance of what was being said.

---

**Week 3:7**

---

Juling: We all, the class, we all beautiful [Gestures to include group – much laughter from others]  
Li Fen: [Also gestures inclusively] all beautiful  
Teacher: [Gestures to include everyone] Oh, we're all beautiful! [Much laughter]  
Various: [Echo] All beautiful  
Yu-Jeong: Beautiful teacher

---

And so the “What did you do on the weekend?” activity continued.

**The Local Dynamics of Classroom Space: A Closer Look**

How might we make sense of the local dynamics of interpersonal and pedagogic space created by the “What did you do on the weekend?” activity? While the kind of interaction evidenced above cannot be predicted, much less prescribed, it can be seen to arise in the context of certain practices on the part of the teacher. For example, the teacher’s engagement with students is characterized by a focus that privileges attention to meaning over language form (e.g., Week 1:3), although not to the exclusion of attention to form (e.g., Week 3:2; 3:3); a supportive power-sharing stance that not only creates opportunities for students to share matters of interest (Week 1:6), but facilitates their initiatives (e.g., Week 1:8); and the support and deployment of humor that facilitates sensitive discussions and promotes student well-being (e.g., Week 1:7; Week 3:6). It also accommodates the inclusion of spiritual dimensions of experience as a matter of course in the rhythm of classroom interaction (Week 1:4, 1:5, 1:6).

Overall, the suite of instructional practices represented in the excerpts combine to demonstrate a subordination of teacher/student identities to “full person” identities. This can be viewed as a meta-practice that enables the creation of pedagogic space at the interface of lived experience and language learning, with the latter subordinated to, and animated by, the former. The effect is that students are positioned as people who not only have matters of interest to share but also have the right to speak, irrespective of English language proficiency. As the interaction plays out, validating responses from the teacher and others affirm them in this capacity. In short,

teacher agency is directed at creating an inviting interpersonal and pedagogic space for language learning that organically engages the realities of significance to students.

### ***Classroom Discourse Patterns***

What are those realities and what is the response of students? In the classroom excerpts examined here, participant contributions consist of personal stories and comments related to the experience of being newcomers to Canada—perceptions and understandings of self in reference to a new place and new ways of being. It is within the multifaceted dynamics of the shared migration story that identity positions are constructed at the micro level by naming or implication in the give and take of discursive agency. This includes instances where positions are claimed (e.g., friendless newcomer), contested (e.g., lonely wife), re-negotiated (e.g., newcomer with good friends), transformed (e.g., strong women), extended (e.g., mutually supportive women), and redefined (e.g., quick-witted conversationalists, enterprising expatriates, beautiful women) among others. Evaluative comments indicate both instances of invalidation (e.g., “I...haven’t good friend”) and validation (e.g., “It is very good that you shared this...”), with comments in the latter category predominant and evidenced not only in the interaction between the teacher and students, but also between students (e.g., “You have very good friends here.” “...the class, we all beautiful.”), and even extended from student to teacher (e.g., “beautiful teacher”).

While these exchanges occur in the dynamic outworking of teacher and student identity roles linked to dimensions of *sociocultural self* and encompass demonstrations and descriptions of social agency, the accounts of stakeholders are not limited to the confines of those identity roles, nor for that matter, social agency. A closer look indicates that participant accounts represent variegated subjectivities constructed by foregrounding different aspects of first person awareness. This can be seen, for example, in the development of Juling’s account. When the teacher seeks to define her condition of unwellness in terms of *familial self* and positions her as “lonely wife”, Juling resists. Instead, she claims the identity of “friendless newcomer”, an appeal to her sense of *sociocultural self*. She constructs this subject position with reference to three types of awareness: *physical* (cough, runny nose), *affective* (very sad, very lonely), and *cognitive* (I don’t know [how to get friends]). When her consultation with acquaintances, an exercise of social agency, falls short of alleviating the sense of invalidated sociocultural self, she decides to pray, by her own account engaging a Transcendent Other. This recourse, arguably an exercise of



spiritual agency, invokes the dimension of transpersonal self and positions her as someone who claims a spiritual identity, in this case the action of prayer enacting an understanding of relationship with that Transcendent Other. Her sense of transpersonal self is validated when she perceives her prayer to be answered (“God answer me”). It is a *spiritual* awareness that provides the lens through which she views and makes sense of subsequent phone calls from friends and an unexpected visit from neighbours, events which provide some longed-for validation of sociocultural self. The teacher, for her part, responds affirmingly, aligning herself with Juling’s view that God answered her prayer, and in so doing, enacting a posture of openness towards spiritually informed subjectivities and claims to spiritual identity in the classroom.

Overall, an analysis of classroom interaction at the micro level of discourse suggests that the significance of personal stories and related interaction goes beyond the immediate details and circumstances of a reported occurrence, signaling also deeper aspects of human experience and related perceptions of validation or lack thereof. A review of classroom discourse with primary reference to the broader categories of self and related validation domains anchored in an understanding of the dynamics of situated multidimensional identity demonstrates this more fully, providing an overall picture of links between discursive agency and foundational dimensions of self invoked in identity construction. Table 1 illustrates this connection, drawing on representative excerpts of classroom discourse thematically analyzed with reference to categories pertaining to dimensions of self and validation domains and presented in order of occurrence.

The profile represented in Table 1 shows, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the interaction emerging in the “What did you do on the weekend?” activity encompasses the construction of identity positions related primarily to the dimension of *sociocultural* self. Nevertheless, appeals are also made to *transpersonal*, *transcultural*, *familial*, and *bodily* aspects of self. Furthermore, in the “Validation Domains” category, the predominant representation of *relationships* underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships as a source of validation at this time in students’ lives. While the interaction from Week 1 includes student disclosures of spatially oriented invalidation linked to limited access to meaningful relationships and activities arising from relocation to Canada, these are coupled with validating responses made by the teacher and other students, creating a spatially oriented distinction between inside and outside the class. In contrast, the interaction of Week 3 is characterized entirely of validating remarks and related

identity construction. Although these expressions still have much to do with interpersonal relationships, other domains have increased prominence, including *activities* (art club activities, baking), *physical things* (drawings, special cookies, beautiful Asian bodies) and *symbolic things* (English proficiency/use, holiday celebration, beauty of character). All of these are linked to *place*, encompassing aspects of validating interpersonal interaction in Canada that emerge, in part, due to demonstrations of social agency outside of class in follow-up to the in-class discussions of Week 1.

Table 1. *Participant Comments, Dimensions, and Validation Domains*

Participant Comments		Dimension of Self	Validation Domain
Week 1	I'm very sad.... I feel uncomfortable...I feel very lonely	Sociocultural self (invalidated)	Relationships (Place: Community/Canada)
	I... haven't good friend		
	I prayed, "God I am very lonely." He brought you some hope. Good.	Transpersonal (spiritual) self (validated)	Relationships
	We all do [have lonely days]	Transcultural-existential self (validated)*	Relationships (Place: Everywhere/ Canada/ESL Class)
	Women need each other		
	You have very good friends here.	Sociocultural self (validated)	Relationships (Place: ESL Class/Canada)
	We all care (about you).		
	I cried	Familial self (under validated)	Relationships (Place: Canada)
	You missed him [husband]		
	I am not missing him. Just a little bit.		
	Every year I have this special dinner [Lunar New Year celebration]	Sociocultural self (invalidated)	Activity/Symbolic Thing (Place: Canada)
	This year I haven't [special dinner]		
	[sharing with class] It is very good.	Sociocultural self (validated)	Relationships (Place: ESL Class/Canada)
	You feel better when you talk about it		
Week 3	That's good. You did a good, a good job [English language use].	Sociocultural self (validated)	Symbolic Thing (Place: Class/Canada)
	Juling last weekend always busy.	Sociocultural self (validated)	Relationships/Activities (Place: Juling's home/ Community/Canada)
	it is important thing, is the group is BEAUTIFUL LADIES GROUP	Bodily self (validated)	Literal/Symbolic Thing [Asian Body/Beauty] (Place: Community/Canada)
	We all, the class, we all beautiful	Existential self (validated)	Relationships (Place: ESL Class/Canada)

\*Here the statement that all women have lonely days signals empathy and thus serves as a means of validating Juling.

### ***Summary of Local Dynamics of Classroom Space***

How might we succinctly characterize the “What did you do on the weekend?” activity? Does it provide space for listening and speaking practice? negotiation of meaning with strategic attention to form? development of communicative competence? meaningful conversation? support, care, and validation of members of the learning community? support, care, and validation of newcomers to Canada? social engagement and friendship building? spiritual engagement? Some of the above? All of the above? Something else?

The answer to these questions depends greatly on how one makes sense of classroom space and related interactions. The “What did you do on the weekend?” activity, by its design, positions learners as social subjects rather than as subjects of language learning, inviting them to create meanings around the realities and subject positions of their choice rather than presenting them with pre-determined social realities around which to practice language. While it is possible for students to experience such an activity as language practice only, the responses seen here suggest that those involved view the interaction as more than a pedagogic exercise. This is evidenced in the scope and non-superficial quality of the multi-participant communication as well as the out-of-class follow-up to declarations of friendship and offers of support. The expressions of agency, both in and out of class, effect desirable changes in the lived experience of participants which in turn become the basis for ongoing discussion and language learning. Pedagogic space in this classroom thus emerges as a welcoming place for the simultaneous and dynamic outworking of “stories-so-far” (Massey, 2005), stories discursively rendered in English in successful appropriation of the language of power beyond the classroom. This invites a closer look at the macro-level conditions in which these micro-level interactions arise.

### **Broader Influences on Classroom Dynamics**

The accounts told during “What did you do on the weekend?” are individual variations of the broader story of migration to Canada that has emerged as part of larger interconnected stories including those pertaining to political, economic, educational, religious, and familial systems and structures at multiple levels (e.g., Aye & Guerin, 2001; Goh-Grapes, 2009; Han 2009, Ley & Tse, 2013; Noels & Barry, 2006). While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore a full range of representative connections in detail, it is helpful to take a closer look at institutional

perspectives related to the church-sponsored ESL program as well as views brought to the practice of language teaching by program providers.

### ***Faiths***

To facilitate the discussion at hand, I wish to use the term *faith* and, following the late Earl Stevick (2013), I begin with the understanding that

an article of faith is simply one or another of the deepest of those guiding assumptions that a person works from. It may be on a spiritual topic, but it doesn't have to be. Some articles of faith are consciously arrived at and held, but others arise from less conscious sources. Many articles of faith are parts of what the holder of the article thinks of as "just plain common sense." (p. 64)

When Stevick began his teaching career in the late 1940s, the dominant "faith" in the Western world conceived of humans as beings governed by the mechanics of a complex body system (Bloomfield, 1933). This was a view rooted in Descartes' 17<sup>th</sup> century division of nature into two distinct realms—the mental or experiential on one hand and the physical or material on the other. It was an arrangement that, in effect, parceled out the conscious mind along with soul and spirit to religion and the material world to science leading to the dominance of materialistic behaviourism in academia (Gross & Simmons 2009; Kristjánsson, 2013b). The characterization of humans as little more than bundles of biological complexity left its mark on language learning in the form of perspectives and practices that conceptualized learning as habit formation (Fries, 1945; Skinner, 1957; Stevick, 2013).

In North America, this perspective of language and learning was challenged and shown to be inadequate, most famously by Noam Chomsky (1959), leading to a guiding faith that saw humans not only as biological, but more importantly, as cognitive beings (Chomsky, 1965; Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972). The implications for language learning were significant (Larsen-Freeman, 2007), undergirding what has until recently in the West been seen as the dominant paradigm in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Atkinson, 2011a), a position characterized by "psychologically oriented theories that construe knowledge as residing in the mind, assume that learning is an individual accomplishment, and posit that mind achieves learning through environmental stimuli" (Ortega, 2011, p. 168). However, with the passage of time, limitations related to this position also began to emerge (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Larsen-Freeman, 2007), leading to another paradigm shift (Block, 2003), this one highlighting the importance of

understanding language learners as social beings (e.g., Gao, 2010; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). From this perspective, learning is viewed as social accomplishment, knowledge and learning are socially distributed, have social histories, and are only possible through social interaction (Ortega, 2011, p. 168).

While this latter understanding has had increasingly noticeable effects on theoretical discussions and related research (Atkinson, 2011b; Lafford, 2007; Zuengler & Miller, 2006), it can be argued that the influence is less evident in generally held assumptions about language learning and related classroom practices. It is a point made by Han (2009), who documents the trajectory of a Chinese immigrant couple as they adjusted to Canadian society, including learning English, through the support received in a Chinese-Canadian church community. Although Han's article does not mention church-sponsored ESL classes, her account of support, genuine care for, and inclusion of newcomers is consistent with demonstrations in the ESL program considered here. In her discussion, Han (2009) challenges the underlying assumption—the cognitive faith—that has dominated the field of language learning in many quarters, stating: “The commonsense assumption that language learning...should be examined and addressed as a purely linguistic matter has dominated the field of applied linguistics and...is an ideological position. It is a consequential choice...to problematize and challenge this assumption” (p. 663). Her call is for greater understanding and related action in light of the complex social dynamics in which language is learned and used. She goes on to assert that the responsibility for societal inclusion does not rest solely with newcomers, and that much can be learned from the practices of institutional inclusion found in “alternative spaces” (p. 665), a term she applies to ethnic minority church communities. This perspective can also be helpfully applied to church-based language programs (Han & Varghese, 2019), and I suggest that the volunteer-run church-sponsored program considered here can be characterized as an alternative language learning space. Furthermore, given the interconnectedness of micro-level agentive actions and macro-level ideological structures (Cummins, 2000; Kristjánsson, 2013a; Massey, 2005), it seems that additional insights stand to be gained by examining the broader perspectives that inform the dynamics of this space.

### ***Program Provider Perspectives***

Whereas formal language programs have been charged with failing to accommodate important aspects of learner identity (Morgan, 2002), the presence and implementation of the “What did you do on the weekend?” activity suggests a different perspective in this community-based church-sponsored program. When asked what the church hoped to accomplish by offering an ESL program, the senior pastor cast the institution as an agent of social change responsible for taking measures to alter spatial dynamics in the broader social arena, emphatically stating: “The church has to take a lead in actively embracing cultures and ethnic people that are coming...breaking down the cultural and communication barriers.” The outworking of this metaphorical position was clarified by the pastor directly responsible for the ESL program as “us[ing] English as a Second Language as a way of developing a better community...a greater understanding and cooperation between people.” These comments point to an institutional vision characterized by a commitment to demonstrations of inclusion (“actively embrace”) in conjunction with deliberate efforts to reverse exclusion (“breaking down cultural and communication barriers”) in the interest of effecting positive social change. On these grounds, it would seem that pedagogical space in the classroom was informed by ideologically defined space at the institutional level.

While it is not uncommon to find a disconnect between expressions of ideological disposition by stakeholders at different levels of institutional involvement, in this case a complementary position was taken by the class teacher whose characterization of what she was doing was also anchored in metaphors descriptive of open space. In her remarks, she enthusiastically likened teaching English in the program to figurative and literal acts of hospitality, stating “...just making them feel welcome in this country...I love that part of it.... It’s like you’re welcoming them into your home, that’s what you’re doing. And I do that too.” Furthermore, she depicted this welcome as the beginning of an opportunity to develop friendships, an endeavour enabled by sharing the language which made possible the sharing of lives:

...developing relationships with them, that’s the neatest part about this experience. And giving them an opportunity to share, not just the language, but share about their lives, you know? I love that...getting to know them as human, as people, not just speakers or talkers, you know? Not just on a conversation level but at a communication level.

In the teacher's account, the classroom was thus represented as a place where newcomers were warmly welcomed, positioned not just as language clients, but as people the teacher genuinely wanted to know and communicate with on more than a superficial level. For her part, she positioned herself as someone entering into relationship with students as "human, as people" first and as language learners second. It was this stance of being in relationship that established the foundation for learning, an interpersonal position that became an epistemological relationship—a way of knowing.

However, there was more than social and interpersonal significance attached to the development and practices of the church-sponsored ESL program. At the foundation lay an understanding informed by spiritual values, a connection made explicit by the pastor who oversaw the program:

...we believe in a lot of values that focus around empowerment of people, and blessing and encouragement of people...whether they be part of the church or not...God has made everybody on earth, and has made them all in His image, and they are valuable. Christ in fact, when He came, has died for them and given His life for them and we need to have those same values, to give our life for them as well.

In his representation of institutional values, all people, including newcomers, were positioned as valuable, a value determined not by their relationship to the church, but rather by virtue of their position as created by God in his likeness—as spiritual beings. The identity of newcomers, like all others, was thus constructed first with reference to spiritual values and significance. The supreme value placed on human life was illustrated further with reference to Christ's death to remove the barrier of separation and open up access to relationship with God. Furthermore, from this pastor's perspective, followers of Christ, represented in this case by those in his church, were to embrace the same values in their interaction with others. In this way, the ESL program was depicted as emerging from a foundation where Christ's self-giving, an act of divine agency central to understandings of Scripture and theology, provided the model for human agency. It is a representation that depicts human interaction not just as social text but, in light of the role of spiritual values, as spiritual text, arguably an embodiment of sacred text.

### **Overarching Metaphors and Alternative Space**

Guiding constructs are often expressed in terms of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and these metaphors can have an impact on the manner in which both teachers and students

approach the educational experience (Williams & Burden, 1997). In the comments above, program providers draw on metaphors of embrace and hospitality to depict their understanding of what they are doing. Both metaphors entail self-giving, and in this context their use may be seen as stemming from an understanding of human relationships informed by the ultimate act of self-giving, Christ's gift of his life on the cross. These linked understandings incorporate the spatial imagery of offering or creating space as a prerequisite for facilitating the claiming of space (Volf, 1996). Some additional exploration of this understanding is helpful in making sense of the alternative space under consideration.

### **Embrace**

In a penetrating and thought provoking consideration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation, Volf (1996) makes the case for seeing embrace as representative of human interaction, that is "the entire realm of human relations in which the interplay between the self and the other takes place" (p. 140). In explaining his choice, he concedes that the image of embrace might seem too intimate for people in some cultures but states that he is not so much interested in the physical act as in the dynamic relationship between self and other symbolized by embrace. It is this perspective that I take in what follows.

According to Volf (1996), in the drama of embrace, the first move, opening the arms, signals one person reaching for another indicating that "I have *created space* in myself for the other to come in and that I have made a movement out of myself so as to enter the space created by the other" (p. 141, original emphasis). Volf likens this both to a door that is left open for a friend and to a soft knock on the others' door. The second move is to simply wait. Open arms stop at the boundary of the other—they are not an act of invasion. Waiting is a sign that although the embrace might originate with one person, it cannot reach its goal without reciprocity on the part of the other. In the drama of embrace, the third move, the goal of embrace, is closing the arms. As Volf notes, it takes two pairs of arms for one embrace; "a host is a guest, and a guest is a host" (p. 143). Without reciprocity, there is no embrace. Yet at the same time, one must keep the boundaries of self firm so as not to be engaged in a self-destructive act of passive assimilation. The final act of embrace is opening the arms again. This underscores the fact that both must preserve their identities. These are identities enriched, but not overwhelmed, by that which has been left by the presence of the other.



Embrace reflects the posture of representatives of the church-sponsored ESL program considered here in that newcomers to Canada are viewed as the ones to be invited into relationship, both in the classroom and beyond. The church-based ESL community creates space for newcomers who want to enter into relationship. However, relationships are not forced and the offer of embrace may be refused instead of accepted, a choice demonstrated at the most basic level by a student's decision of whether or not to attend classes, in this case offered for the price of coffee and cookies for those who could afford to pay. When the invitation is accepted, there is growth in mutual understanding. The hosts come to understand the students more fully, and the students gain a new understanding of the hosts and the culture which they represent.

The classroom interaction examined here suggests that the program does not seek to neutralize the uniqueness of different participants. Their identities are recognized and celebrated in a variety of ways, including highlighting students' home cultures within the classroom and in the larger community. This reflects the final act of embrace, opening the arms. It is an act that demonstrates respect for the identity of the other in the closeness of relationship. It is also an act that does not leave the other overpowered, but enriched, as they go on to encounters in other spaces.

### **Hospitality**

In describing the drama of embrace, Volf (1996) compares the first move, the creating of space, to both a door left open for a friend and a soft knock on the others' door, thereby linking embrace to hospitality. In the program under consideration here, hospitality emerges figuratively and literally in the teacher's account as well as in the developments surrounding Juling's disclosure in the classroom. The metaphor of hospitality as it relates to education is helpfully illuminated further by Palmer (1983, 1998), who notes its origins in ancient times when in nomadic cultures, the food and shelter given to a stranger one day was the food and shelter one hoped to receive from a stranger the next day. In this respect Palmer (1998) writes: "By offering hospitality, one participates in the endless reweaving of a social fabric on which all can depend" (p. 50). Palmer (1983) also makes the link to learning explicit: "To be inhospitable to strangers or strange ideas, however unsettling that may be, is to be hostile to the possibility of truth; hospitality is not only an ethical virtue, but an epistemological one as well" (p. 74). The act of

welcoming strangers and the unknown elements they represent signifies creating space for the discovery of new understanding (cf., Smith & Carvill, 2000; Smith, 2009).

Pohl (1999) defines strangers as people without a place, those who are “detached from basic life-supporting institutions...without networks of relations that sustain and support human beings” (p. 87), a description that characterizes the experiences of many migrants (Ley & Tse, 2013). Offering hospitality to strangers involves making room for those with no place. For those in the role of host, offering true hospitality means sharing themselves and their lives, not just their skills (Pohl, 2002, p. 125). It also means listening. In Palmer’s view, hospitality within the classroom requires not only treating students with civility and compassion, but inviting them and their insights into the conversation. It means assuming they have stories to tell and making space for those stories as part of the process of knowing (Pohl, 1999, p. 79). Making space for their stories also means seeing people as human beings rather than embodied needs or interruptions (p. 178). Far more than a tame and pleasant practice, hospitality in this sense can have a countercultural dimension and function as an act of resistance. As Pohl (1999) observes, “Especially when the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons, small acts of respect and welcome are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of valuing and an alternate model of relationships” (p. 61).

This kind of faith-informed system of valuing and alternative model of relationships are central to the construction of alternative space examined here. In the accounts of both senior leaders and the classroom teacher, the program and classroom are depicted as places where the host who has cultural power opens up the home, so to speak, to those without that power. Guests are welcomed and given loving attention. As seen in the classroom interaction, their stories are listened to and their identities affirmed. At the same time, the hosts are enriched by the presence of the guests. The reported result of hospitality is that students begin to interact with increasing competence and confidence in the new home setting. In short, the church-sponsored ESL program examined here is a place of open space where those who offer it function as door openers rather than gatekeepers to Canadian society. In light of the guiding values in this community, it may be argued that stakeholders’ understanding of a spacious home stems from a spacious heart, a heart enlarged by spiritual values (cf. Volf, 1997, p. 11).

### **The Heart of Alternative Space**

This draws us back to the construct of embrace. For followers of Christ, reference to his love is inextricably intertwined with his giving of self. The image of Christ with arms open wide, nailed to the horizontal beam of a cross, is an image of the ultimate offer of embrace—God reaching out to humanity, inviting each one into loving relationship with himself. This is the heart of the alternative space considered here, a space where recipients of God’s embrace in turn make space for others within themselves (Volf, 1996), where social relationships on the horizontal plane are practically informed by the vertical relationship of self-giving love between God and people. It is a space where humans are seen not just as biological or cognitive or even social beings, but a space where they are also viewed as spiritual beings whose meaningful existence transcends the boundaries of physical existence.

This has implications for identity and agency. Volf (1996, pp. 208-209) argues that Christians inescapably inhabit two worlds—they are “in God” and “in the world”, including the world of their own culture. As the Word made flesh, Christ entered into the experiences of those around him, enacting the culture of the Kingdom of God in the context of the culture of his day. Similarly, Volf holds that personal transformation brought about by accepting Christ’s invitation of embrace extended on the cross has consequences for understandings of social arrangements and injustice. He prioritizes the former without diminishing the importance of the latter, contending that repentance and forgiveness on a spiritual level are linked to “creation of the kind of social agents that are shaped by the values of God’s kingdom and therefore capable of participating in the project of authentic social transformation” (p. 118). This brings to mind Wenger’s (1998) characterization of identity as a relation between the local and the global, wherein people define who they are by “negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses” (p. 149). It is a characterization that illuminates the significance program providers attach to the existence of the church-sponsored ESL program as well as stakeholder participation in classroom interaction, all of which emerge as local expressions of the broader dynamics of migration and worldview. It is a perspective that accommodates the simultaneity of local and global ways of being in the world, including contextually relevant expressions of Christian faith. These expressions may further be understood to construct space not only as social text, but also as spiritual text, informed and animated by sacred text.

## Conclusion

During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious faith was viewed in rigidly defined spatial terms by the Western academy, a position still current in many quarters today. Deemed irrelevant to understandings of consequence in the mainstream, it has typically been relegated to specialized areas of study (Hopkins, Kong & Olson, 2013) or private spheres of existence (Goheen, 2009), and there have been high expectations for an “evacuation of the sacred” (Gross & Simmons, 2009, p. 102). Yet despite the promises of secularization theory, the evacuation of religious faith has not gone according to plan (Grassie, 2010; Melleuish, 2005). Within the academy there are places where calls are now being made to reconsider “the secularist presumptions which allow for a disaggregation of religious life from other aspects of society and self” (Hopkins, Kong & Olson, 2013, pp. 11-12), including in the field of applied linguistics (e.g., Bigelow, 2018; Han, 2018). These voices add to earlier calls by those for whom Christian faith has long been understood as having a constitutive influence in academic spheres as elsewhere (e.g., Marsden, 1997; Stevick, 1990). Not only are they calls to expand the spaces of the academy, they are calls to Christian English language educators and researchers to pursue deeper understandings of the faiths that inform their practices in the complex and dynamic spaces of teaching and learning wherever they may be. In short, to those who choose to accept the challenge, they are calls to thoughtfully examine the texts being made in the living of our lives.

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## Reviews

### ***Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis***

Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam Smeir. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016.

### ***Refugee***

Alan Gratz. New York: Scholastic Press, 2017.

### ***Once We Were Strangers:***

### ***What Friendship with a Syrian Refugee Taught Me about Loving My Neighbor***

Shawn Smucker. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2018.

Reviewed by R. Michael Medley, Eastern Mennonite University

English language teachers (ELTs) need to be advocates for their refugee and immigrant students. Such advocacy includes educating school administrators, community leaders, and fellow citizens about the needs of their learners. Their young language learners will have the greatest chance of success if the surrounding community offers them sympathetic support. One or more of the three books reviewed here could enhance ELTs' advocacy by evoking empathy for their learners.

These three books will appeal to different kinds of readers, confronting them with the realities of refugee life in different ways. Three main approaches embodied in them are persuasive rhetoric (Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir); personal reflection (Smucker); and dramatic fictional experiences (Gratz).

Writing as the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 spiraled upward and as the nomination campaigns of the 2016 Presidential election heated up, Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir aimed their book, *Seeking Refuge*, specifically at evangelical Christians, arguing that the U.S. church's response to the refugee crisis would be its defining moment. Bauman is the former president of World Relief, the international relief and development agency of the National Association of Evangelicals. Matthew Soerens, a legal expert on refugee resettlement, is the director of church mobilization for World Relief. Issam Smeir, a consultant for World Relief, is a psychologist providing therapy for traumatized Middle Eastern refugees.

In addition to laying a biblical and theological foundation for granting refuge to those fleeing human cruelty and oppression, the authors highlight information that would have special appeal to evangelicals: for example, the idea that refugees are God's way of bringing the world

to neighborhoods where Christians may evangelize them. They also highlight the fact that many refugees are Christians, e.g., those fleeing persecution in countries such as Myanmar.

In describing the challenges of resettlement, the authors take up one that should be familiar to most trained ESL teachers—cultural adaptation. Co-author Smeir takes up the less familiar, but perhaps even more weighty challenge—the effects of trauma. The cultural and psychological challenges of resettlement are developed well through the case study of a man from Iraq named Sameer. The book also describes the harrowing experiences of asylum seekers.

Bauman, Soerens and Smeir's call to evangelical churches is both realistic and idealistic. They entreat Christians not to remain silent about the plight of refugees and not to allow politicians and news media to manipulate them by depicting refugees as a menace to our society. They cite discouraging statistics that point to lukewarm support of refugees among evangelical Christians (p. 183). Churches, they contend, are contributing much less than the magnitude of the problem demands.

Even though *Seeking Refuge* makes a persuasive case for a compassionate Christian response to the global refugee crisis, postmodern readers may be more powerfully influenced by the personal and fictional accounts provided, respectively, by Smucker and Gratz.

Shawn Smucker's *Once We Were Strangers*, taking the form of a personal diary, provides insights into the refugee experience from the perspective of an American who befriends a Syrian refugee in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In recounting his visits to the Church World Service refugee office in Lancaster and his encounters with a Syrian family, Smucker evokes the 2016 post-election mood of fear and discouragement among those ministering to refugees. His diary entries alternate between the Syrian family's hardships and his personal meditations on the struggle to develop a relationship with Mohammad, the head of the household.

Smucker at first intended to portray the experiences of Mohammad and his family making the difficult decision to leave their home in Syria, navigating their way through Jordan, and eventually landing in Pennsylvania as a riveting action-adventure tale, one in which he would play the role of a "middle-aged man in search of meaning [who] helped a Syrian family find the American dream" (pp. 181-182). The book did not turn out that way. Instead, even though readers gain some acquaintance with the Syrian family's experience, they learn as much about Smucker's own growth as an American who gets stretched in ways that are not always comfortable for him. By the end of this diary-like memoir, he has arrived at these conclusions:

My belief that they need my help more than they need my friendship was brought low. My deep-seated, hidden concern that every Muslim person might be inherently violent or dedicated to the destruction of the West was exposed and found to be false. (p. 182)

If you insert me into the story of the Good Samaritan...I'm not only the one who stopped to help. I'm also the man lying along the side of the road beaten down. I'm the one dying from selfishness and hypervigilance and fear. (p. 183)

If Smucker's hard-hitting self-examination does not force readers to reconsider the consequences of their response to refugees, then Alan Gratz's dramatic fictional account might do the trick. Written at a fifth-grade reading level and intended for middle school students, *Refugee* is a novel that many adults can enjoy and profit from reading. Gratz is an award-winning author of young adult literature, and *Refugee* remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over six months.

*Refugee* cleverly weaves together the stories of three young refugees: a Jewish boy fleeing Nazi Germany with his family; a Cuban girl and her family, who were part of the flotilla of refugees headed to Florida in 1994; and a Syrian boy and his family fleeing to Germany from civil war in his country in 2015. Given the current political atmosphere, Gratz has masterfully juxtaposed self-evidently "good refugees" — ones fleeing Nazi brutality or Communist cruelty — with the "feared Muslim Syrians."

Some of the strengths of the book include its realistic portrayal of trauma associated with the refugee experience; personal degradation and humiliation as key elements of that trauma; triggers of retraumatization; and characters who are generous and kind to refugees as well as those who cruelly inflict harm. Gratz's exploration of the theme of visibility and invisibility is especially insightful. He shows how, in situations of grave danger, refugees learn to be invisible; yet this invisibility lies in tension with their need to make themselves visible by exercising their agency.

Adult readers should be warned about one annoying aspect of the novel: the obviously manipulative cliffhangers at the end of many chapters. Since the book is intended for juveniles, the cheap suspense may be excusable as a device to keep middle schoolers reading. There is, however, an emotional surprise at the end of the novel that could help to assuage irritation with this device.

Adults reading the novel will understand more readily than young readers the politics and politicians behind each of the interwoven narratives. In a lengthy afterword, Gratz details the historical incidents and real individual experiences which inspired the novel.

English language teachers who have experience working with refugees probably know a great deal of what is presented in these three books by having learned it from their students. However, teachers who have less experience with refugees, and those with less training who work as volunteers in community- and church-based ESL programs, or who work as teachers or support staff in private or public schools, may gain a deeper understanding of refugee learners from these books.

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***Thinking Theologically about Language Teaching:  
Christian Perspectives on an Educational Calling***

Cheri L. Pierson and Will Bankston (Eds.). Carlisle, U.K.: Langham Global Library, 2017.

Reviewed by Michael Pasquale, Cornerstone University

How can we live out our vocation as teachers in a way that is scriptural? This is the unifying theme of this broad collection of essays edited by Cheri L. Pierson and Will Bankston. *Thinking Theologically about Language Teaching: Christian Perspectives on an Educational Calling* is an important resource for teachers and educational administrators concerned about the integration of faith and teaching. Pierson is an associate professor of TESOL at Wheaton College (IL) and Bankston holds degrees in both theology and education. Both editors bring their broad backgrounds in education and theology to the forefront in this volume.

The strength of this collection is its focus on both theological contemplation and educational application. The chapters are organized into three thematic units on Theology and Language “Our Content,” Theology and the Teacher “Our Calling,” and Theology and Practice “Our Classroom.” The authors in this volume set out to answer the question, “How can my work play its proper role in the cosmic narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration?” (p. 1). This question is clearly covered in the first two sections relating to the role of theology and

language and also its relation to teacher identity. What is equally valuable is its application to the classroom context, which is rich and rewarding.

The first section, on theology and language, “Our Content,” contains essays relating to theological considerations of language and its functions. In Michael Lessard-Clouston’s chapter, “Biblical Themes for Christians in Language Teaching,” he focuses on biblical themes relevant for Christians teaching language. He discusses seven themes (creativity, understanding, communication, community, sin, diversity, and redemption) and includes a helpful chart with corresponding Bible verses, observations, and potential classroom applications. Karin Spiecker Stetina’s chapter gives practical instruction on how to help students understand context, types, methods, and genres in language teaching. She considers “how can Christian educators equip language learners to recognize, understand, and respond to God’s truth” (p. 31). Will Bankston’s chapter on “Using Words to Change the World” is the final chapter in this section. He devotes space to explain the linguistic framework of Ludwig Wittgenstein and sees its use to “help bridge the gap between theology and language pedagogy, providing us with a much richer understanding of speaking, an action common to both us and our Creator” (p. 55).

The second section, “Our Calling: Theology and the Teacher,” contains three essays that focus on teacher identity and vocation. Kaylene Powell, in a biographical piece, focuses on the place of glory, humility, and worship in the life of a teacher. Bradley Baurain argues in his chapter that there is a tendency for teachers, especially Christian teachers, to have an issue with pride and he calls teachers to humility and for Christian teachers to live out biblical virtue in the classroom. He writes that “[w]e approach teaching as learners and strive to remain open to reflection, criticism, and discovery while simultaneously believing that we have something good and true and eternal which we must try to live out and to which we must bear witness” (p. 130). Robert L. Gallagher’s chapter emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a teacher and how we must be “Spirit-filled” to remain effective as teachers. He suggests that teachers should follow in the footsteps of Christ as the Master Teacher who relied on the Holy Spirit through prayer and meditation.

The third and last section, “Our Classroom: Theology and Practice,” is comprised of four essays which aim to apply various scriptural ideas to teaching praxis. Cheri Pierson’s chapter focuses on using metaphors to help express biblical concepts. Her purpose is to “explore some well-known methods in second and foreign language education as metaphor and then to offer

some scriptural reflections for second language educators to consider as they think more deeply about the process of teaching in the classroom” (p. 166). Marilyn Lewis’s chapter “Managing Twenty-First-Century Classes Biblically” addresses classroom management issues and the roles that teachers play as servants, leaders, and ultimately as salt of the earth. Bankston returns to contribute another chapter on “Dialogue, Divinity, and Deciphering the Self.” He illustrates the power of dialogue as an effective didactic approach. He writes that “well-designed dialogues elicit essential and accurate self-knowledge, they likewise elicit knowledge of God. And so, we must never underestimate the truly transformative power of dialogue” (p. 211). Melissa Smith contributes the final chapter of the volume, entitled “Yahweh’s Taxonomy of Deeper Dimensions.” She considers Bloom’s taxonomy and views it through the lens of a Christian worldview. This in turn is considered in relation to the importance of educational outcomes and objectives. She argues that language teachers “can and should plumb the deeper dimensions with their students as the Master Teacher does with his” (p. 242).

The audience for this book is obviously teachers who share a Christian world and life view, particularly those who are teaching at Christian schools and universities. This volume is extremely practical and is helpful for those teaching in a Christian context where we are often asked to reflect on the integration of faith and our disciplines. The authors clearly lead us in this task and demonstrate “best practice” in this regard.

While the book had strong chapters throughout, it would have been helpful to have introductions for each section. This would have been beneficial in order to fully understand how the essays in each section fit into the theme. This would also have helped delineate how theology and its subsequent application to language, teacher identity, and practice clearly relate.

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***Spirituality and English Language Teaching:  
Religious Explorations of Teacher Identity, Pedagogy and Context***

Mary Shepard Wong and Ahmar Mahboob (Eds.). Bristol, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2018.

Reviewed by Frank Tuzi, Liberty University

Mary Shepard Wong and Ahmar Mahboob work together with more than 15 other authors to investigate teacher identity, pedagogy, and context through the window of instructors' religious experience and beliefs. The editors recognize that spiritual beliefs and religious/philosophical experience have always influenced teaching, though many in the profession would like to ignore or suppress those experiences. Their overarching focus examines how teachers build and enhance a critical, reflective, conscious teaching practice because of a spiritual experience.

What is interesting and important to note is that these authors pen their experiences from a variety of religious backgrounds, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. The authors also investigate and share these perspectives from their own personal cultural foundations, which further individualizes the religious experience these language educators describe.

The chapters in the book explore three primary areas: (1) Religious faith and teacher identity; (2) Religious faith and pedagogical practice; and (3) Religious faith and the language learning context. Each of these areas includes different perspectives of the topic based on the personal experiences of the teachers, and each section closes with a chapter responding to the section's other content. The authors believe that given the opportunity to review and reflect upon those who mold and enhance their teaching through their spiritual experience, they can motivate their readers to reflect on more effective ways to develop a rich pedagogy while providing superior education enhanced with a deeper spirituality.

The forward, written by Suresh Canagarajah, describes three primary reasons why spirituality is growing in importance in the educational realm. The first point is that language learning and research do not exist only within a logical-positivist worldview but also encompass qualitative and experiential worldview research. Additionally, it is important to recognize that teaching is actually the combination of an identity that integrates skills and knowledge into one overarching method founded on individual beliefs. Finally, language learning is more than the mastery of syntax and lexicon. It incorporates the interactions of behaviors and personalities from a diverse group whose philosophical, religious, and cultural backgrounds impact individual language learning.

Part 1, Religious Faith and Teacher Identity, includes three chapters attempting to explore teacher identity from the perspective of a religious faith. The Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim



authors in this section ponder the impact of their religious underpinnings on their teacher identity. The reflections identify how their beliefs bring unique benefits and some possible precautions to their teaching and their identity. Hartse and Nazari explore how their respective Christian and Muslim faiths were received, expressed, and parts that were even concealed and changed because of the comparison of common values. They discovered through this dual ethnography a dynamic of individuals trying to weave their understandings and beliefs from their history into their teacher identity. The section ended with asking the question about how teachers can have an identity that is distinctively religious and still teach language in a professional manner. Each of the participants in this section of the book began to realize that they could learn from each other's culture and religious foundation.

Part 2 explores Religious Faith and Pedagogical Practice. The authors in this section have backgrounds in Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. They explored how their faith helps to influence their pedagogical practices. For example, Brown recognized that part of her teaching pedagogy included a preference for teaching and cultivating a respectful and curious attitude that incorporates meditative reflection. Using these pedagogical tools enables students to not only reflect on and consider their own language learning, but does so using Buddhist methodologies, which may be unknown to language learners. Another author, Sharma, recognizes that his pedagogical tools incorporate values and ideas inherent in Hinduism such as learner-centeredness and learner autonomy. Although these two authors recognize their religiously influenced pedagogical methods, Vandrick came to a different conclusion, which is that teachers can be influenced by spirituality and even be spiritual, but not religious, or that teachers can be ethical without being religious. In other words, it is possible to embody some of the spiritual tools in pedagogy without linking them to religious dogma or history.

Part 3 focuses on Religious Faith and the Language Learning Context. The first author, Shaaban, clearly demonstrates how the cultural context in which a language is taught has a tremendous impact on language teaching. Life in Lebanon, for example, is replete with diverse people groups, languages, cultures, and religions. Thus, teaching in such a context favors acceptance and diversity of many different ideas and groups with the primary cultural group being Muslim. Although these different religious groups have varied reasons for teaching language, they try to train their students to not only master language, but also "character, identity, morals and values" (p. 148). The next two chapters in the section were actual studies in which

researchers tried to identify how teachers thought about religious values impacting pedagogy and language education. Each of these studies focused on specific groups, one in Egypt and one in Canada. Each study discovered there was indeed a religious impact on pedagogy.

*Spirituality and English Language Teaching* is a captivating and thought-provoking text. To be sure, some readers would struggle to identify the advantage of the text due to their nature to dominate. Some readers do not favor collaboration and cooperation but rather seek to isolate and remove the voices they find offensive. This book was a refreshing deep discussion reflecting on how people from diverse faiths and cultural backgrounds can work together and learn from each other while at the same time focusing on providing superior education, both from a linguistic and from a moral and ethical perspective.

This book also brings to light many faith-filled teachers who have a heart and passion for teaching and caring for people. These teachers have a philosophical or spiritual base. And although they embody beliefs and methodological tools from their faith, these teachers are not proselytizing. They are fulfilling their duty as teachers and people who seek to train up good and moral people who can live in a diverse society.

The editors of and contributors to *Spirituality and English Language Teaching* do not try to hide the fact that all teachers have some religious or spiritual foundation. Therefore, they encourage English language teachers to remain diligent to imbue the beneficial components of their faith into their teaching and identity while not allowing their faith to hamper the training and maturity of the language learners they are attempting to nurture.

*Spirituality and English Language Teaching* will benefit any language teacher or researcher by helping them to better understand the impact that faith has on language teaching. This text will challenge readers' perceptions of the benefits or dangers of faith in language teaching and will motivate them to consider the possibility that their faith can have a positive impact on their teacher identity and pedagogy. Highly recommended!

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***Teaching English for Reconciliation:  
Pursuing Peace Through Transformed Relationships in Language Learning and Teaching***  
Jan Edwards Dormer and Cheryl Woelk. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2018.

Reviewed by Michael Westwood, Bakersfield College

As Christian English language teachers continue to explore ways to appropriately integrate their faith and profession, teaching for peacemaking and reconciliation has come to the fore as a way of maintaining respect for learners and fidelity to the Christian faith. While peacemaking and reconciliation are generally well-regarded concepts, these terms can appear vague and unclear. This leaves many Christian English language teachers uncertain of how to teach for peace and reconciliation in their own classrooms. Dormer and Woelk successfully address this gap between good-sounding ideas and actual practice by clearly defining teaching English for reconciliation and exploring how this can be accomplished in a wide variety of educational contexts.

Dormer and Woelk divide their text into three main sections. In the first section, they establish the foundation for English teaching for reconciliation, clarifying a concept that has earned them “puzzled looks” in the past (p. 2). They define what language teaching for reconciliation is and situate it within the field of peace studies as well as biblical and pedagogical frameworks. In this first section, they introduce several approaches to teaching English for reconciliation (i.e., relationships, issues, skills, methodologies, and systems). The authors explore these approaches throughout the book, looking at each approach through the lenses of language, faith, and peace.

The second section of the book describes the people involved in teaching English for reconciliation. Rather than simply list and describe potential participants, Dormer and Woelk emphasize the relationships *among* participants, exploring issues such as identity, power, and group dynamics. Additionally, in this section, the authors provide a list of ideal dispositions for English teachers.

The third section of Dormer and Woelk’s book explores the resources available for teaching English for reconciliation. Here, the authors also dive into language teaching theory and explore how different methodologies, group arrangements, and textbooks could be used to foster a classroom environment where students learn language through the process of learning empathy. Dormer and Woelk conclude their text with an extensive appendix, providing concrete activities and lessons to help teachers better understand how these concepts could be put into practice.

Dormer and Woelk provide a thorough exploration of a complex topic, making a strong case for Christian English teachers keeping reconciliation and peacemaking at the forefront of their minds when teaching. In addition, the authors make a thorough connection between teaching English for reconciliation and well-established language teaching principles, making it clear that teaching in this way has pedagogical benefits. By taking the time to establish such a thorough and logical foundation, the authors provide a sense of order and continuity, helping readers not only to understand the specific examples they provide, but also to reflect on their own practices. While they do include a number of specific activities in the text and in the appendices, the authors also make it clear that teaching for reconciliation is not a one-size-fits-all practice. Teachers who purchase this book hoping for a ready-made curriculum that can be applied to any teaching context will be disappointed. However, those who read this book with an aim of becoming more empathetic, reflective, and creative in their own classrooms will be highly satisfied. The effective integration of language teaching, peace studies, and Christianity throughout the text shows that teaching English for reconciliation is not simply a good idea, but rather an emerging field worthy of continued exploration. Further, the authors succeed in their attempt to write a book with a wide potential audience. Both new and veteran teachers will find themselves challenged to think more critically about their craft. Also, while the book has a clear Christian emphasis, there is plenty here for peacemakers of other faith persuasions. Through this text, Dormer and Woelk take a complex and occasionally ethereal subject and make it concrete and relatable.

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***Theological English: An Advanced ESL Text for Students of Theology***

Pierce Taylor Hibbs with Megan Reiley. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

Reviewed by Jan Dormer, Messiah College

*Theological English* is a welcome addition to the growing but still limited selection of materials designed to help English learners studying theology. Two distinctives stand out in this text. The first is that it is written from and for a particular theological perspective, the Reformed tradition. The second distinctive is that it is rooted in the concept that “Language is Trinitarian”

(p. x), reflecting the perspective that God is the creator of language and that language is a “trinity” of grammar, phonology and reference. With “Trinity” as a thread tying together the theological and linguistic elements of the text, the authors masterfully address the complexities of both theology and language, leading students to not only comprehend texts, but to develop the skills to analyze, synthesize, and formulate their own theological understandings using English at an advanced level.

This text is designed to be used in a class setting, though “individual study” tips throughout also make it a viable resource for students of English and theology to use in personal study. There are ten units, each comprising three lessons. The first lesson helpfully introduces the format and purposes of the book. It explains the five theological genres addressed: apologetics, biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. In addition, it provides an overview of the grammar content and an introduction to the various kinds of tasks and activities that students will encounter.

Each lesson follows a similar pattern: Lesson goals are outlined, the theme of the lesson is introduced, and discussion questions and pre-reading activities set the stage for the main reading. The readings are drawn from standard theological materials, and are not adapted for language study except for the provision of word definitions. Because definitions are provided in footnote form at the end of the passage, readings feel authentic rather than reformatted for ESL instruction. An activity on “Main Ideas and Details” always follows the reading, to ensure basic comprehension. Then, various exercises follow, which further develop reading skills, grammar understanding and usage, and vocabulary. Finally, each unit contains at least one practical language production task, utilizing the grammar or vocabulary learned in the unit.

A complete answer key is provided in the back of the book. Following the answer key are three helpful appendices: (1) A theological chart showing the essential questions in each unit; (2) An extensive punctuation guide, and (3) A bibliography of introductory theological texts, each aligned with one of the five genres addressed in the book.

It is not easy to simplify theological English, and yet a readability check found that the authors were able to do just that. The main text is written at about a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, making it a solid “advanced” ESL text, as it claims to be. Of course, the theological passages have a much higher readability level. But the passages are scaffolded nicely with helpful

introductory statements, discussion opportunities, and the footnoting of many possibly unknown words.

The authors utilize more oral activities than might be expected in a book on theological English. There are conversation tasks both integrated into the classroom activities and as out-of-class application exercises. Online lectures are utilized for listening skill development, and I had no difficulty accessing the lecture and even focusing in on the right segment of the lecture, with the provision of the minute count. The full transcript is also provided, and those who may not have Internet access are provided an alternative activity.

A very attractive feature of this text is its presentation and practice of grammatical features. I have seen and used dozens of grammar texts, and find them to be pretty similar and often similarly uninspiring. This text focuses in on key areas of grammar that are both frequent in theological writing and troublesome for advanced English learners, and draws examples and practice activities from theology. Clear and straightforward charts and tables are used for both teaching and practice. Grammar points are not over-explained, but rather illustrated, and then practiced through theology-focused activities. For example, in lesson 12 the grammar focus is on modals. The function of modals is explained as providing the writer's perspective, and a theological passage provides practice on discovering the writer's perspective by looking at the modals used. Then, a simple modal chart is presented, providing common uses and examples drawn from theological writing. Two application activities follow, inviting students to use modals in their own writing and speaking.

Though many texts have a focus on vocabulary, this text includes a specific focus on collocations in every lesson. This intentional zeroing in on words and phrases which occur together may be the key way in which the authors help students develop "English for theology." Utilizing a variety of presentation forms, such as tables and graphic organizers, this text helps students not only understand collocations, but also develop a working use of many phrases or "chunks" of language within the field of theology. For example, in lesson 16 students learn collocations with the verb "understand." They are instructed to find words and phrases collocating with "understanding" in the reading passage, in order to fill in the blanks in a graphic organizer. The completed graphic organizer is provided in the answer key in the back of the book.

A final strength of this text is the inclusion of authentic, real-world application tasks. At least once in each unit, students are asked to use the language they have learned to complete a task—something that they will likely be doing in ministry in the future. For example, in one task, students must write an email to a lead pastor, outlining a sermon idea. In another, students are asked to verbally help a classmate understand a theological point. In yet another, they are asked to write a comment on a blog post. Tasks include simulated interaction with both Christians and non-Christians, and with those in full-time ministry and those who are not.

Widespread use of this text may be enhanced by a few additional edits, publication in different formats (it is currently available only in hardcover), and a closer look at the framing of Reformed positioning.

Some additional editing may increase clarity and ease of use. Sometimes text or examples were referred to as being “above” when they were “below” or vice-versa. In addition, some quoted material is neither in quotes nor indented, making it difficult to distinguish the quoted material from the text. Finally, words and passages are highlighted in the readings, but it is sometimes difficult to discover what the highlighting means, or where it is referenced.

At nearly three pounds, this book will weigh down a backpack! Alternatives might include producing it in a softcover edition, dividing it into two volumes, or producing a version without the answer key. An online resource for teachers could include the answer key and other teaching resources.

Finally, in some instances theological statements were prefaced as representing a Reformed tradition, when in fact other traditions would also embrace those statements. These statements may pose an unnecessary barrier for individuals from other theological traditions, who may find this book to perfectly meet their needs in every other way.

This book was a 2019 finalist in the “Bible Reference Works” category of the Christian Book Awards given annually by the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association (ECPA). I would love to return to a theological English classroom just to have the chance to try it out! The grammar and vocabulary instruction is solid, and the practice activities would no doubt lead to strong theological English development. The readings are well-scaffolded, helping students to make sense of the complexity that is theology. Finally, the practical application tasks are stellar, ensuring that theology is not an end in itself, but a means for impacting our world for Christ.

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***Growing Up with God and Empire: A Postcolonial Analysis of 'Missionary Kid' Memoirs***  
Stephanie Vandrick. Bristol, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2019.

Reviewed by Mary Shepard Wong, Azusa Pacific University

It seems that about every ten years Stephanie Vandrick publishes a notable piece reflecting on the complex connections of colonialism, missionary work, and ELT (Vandrick 1999, 2009, 2018); however, it was not until this book that she has provided an evidenced-based account of the connections and contradictions of missions and ELT. In this book she provides both a personal reflection on, and academic analysis of, 42 memoirs of North American Protestant “missionary kids” (MKs) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This work provides much food for thought and a list of implications for English language educators that are especially pertinent to those who position themselves within the community of Christian English language educators.

The nine chapter titles of the book provide a quick overview of its contents. In Chapter 1, Introduction, Vandrick acknowledges that Western Protestant 20<sup>th</sup> century missionaries “did many good things” (p. 1) although her analysis focuses more on the “long-lasting colonial after-effects” (p. 1) of their presence and work than the benefits she alludes to. A strength of the work is the lens of postcolonial theory and critique that she applies to the missionaries’ participation in the “Western colonial enterprise” (p. 1). An example of her critical analysis is her description of “MKs” as a subset of “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs) who enjoy both insider and outsider status, which is something that she brings to the analysis as an “MK/TCK” herself. She problematizes the term “TCKs” with its connotations of being “well-traveled, culturally aware, [and] sophisticated” (p. 9), noting that these positive qualities are not used to describe immigrant children who come to North America. Vandrick then discusses the psychological and social stresses experienced by missionary kids, and concludes the chapter with a brief history and evolution of the missionary enterprise, her positionality, and an overview of the structure of the book.



In Chapter 2, *Research*, Vandrick comments on the vexed and contentious nature of this area of inquiry. After a brief section on the role of narrative, she describes the data set and her analysis procedures. The next six chapters discuss the themes she found in her research. Chapter 3, *The Exotic*, notes that missionaries often portrayed locals as “exotic others” through references of local people’s appearance and behavior as well as their food, animals, geography, and ceremonies. Chapter 4, *Treatment of Local People*, reveals the sense of superiority that some missionaries harbored toward the local people. Chapter 5, *Schooling*, takes a hard look at missionary boarding schools and the abuse some MKs faced as well as stresses created while in country and upon reentry. Chapter 6, *Learning Local Languages (or Not)*, focuses on attitudes toward language learning and the “privilege” of being a monolingual speaker. The missionary gendered experience is the theme described in Chapter 7, which is further explored in Chapter 8, *Race and Social Class*, where the intersections of race and gender are brought to light. The final chapter provides implications for our work as language educators, making some connections with other publications and research completed in this area.

Vandrick is in a unique position to provide this analysis, given her background as a missionary kid in India and her current standing as a scholar of feminist, critical, and postcolonial theory. It is her ability to strike a conciliatory tone, her willingness to seek a balance, and her genuine vulnerability that allows a range of readers from conservative Christians and religious others to agnostics and atheists to come to her work and find it meaningful, engaging, and insightful. She speaks candidly about working through the “contradictions,” “conflicts,” “mismatch,” “mixed feelings,” “guilty pleasures,” and “severe ambivalences” (pp. 120-121) that she has experienced in this work that she finds hard but personally fulfilling. Strengths of the book not often found in other critiques of missionary work include acknowledging the agency of local people and the diversity among the missionaries.

While the negative aspects of mission work that her analyses reveal may be difficult to accept and perhaps not represent what some readers may have experienced as MKs themselves, this work nonetheless offers an important contribution to our understanding of the connections among missions, colonialism, and ELT. I should acknowledge that I consider Vandrick a mentor and critical friend, who provides a much-needed “other than Christian” perspective on my work. In spite of our different starting places, I find myself resonating with her dilemmas and regard her analyses as credible and informative. I hope the (mostly) Christian readers of this journal will

take the time to consider her experiences and perspectives as we (referring to the community of Christian ELT educators) have much to learn if we are open to suspending judgement and critically examining our assumptions and actions, while not compromising our Christian faith, which we view as central to our lives and work.

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## ***Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission***

James E. Plueddemann. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Reviewed by Timothy R. Sisk, Moody Bible Institute

Hall of Fame college basketball coach John Wooden is famous for noting, “You haven’t taught until they (the students) have learned” (Nater & Gallimore, 2005, p. 3). He has rightfully observed that a teacher who simply vocalizes their material, without regard to whether what is being said is actually being understood and absorbed by the students, really isn’t teaching. Effective teaching is more than a proclamation of knowledge.

*Teaching Across Cultures* is a book designed to help those who have the privilege of teaching cross-culturally by sensitizing them to the cultural chasms that exist and then offering suggestions on how to build bridges across those gaps. From his decades of experience as an educator and missiologist, author James Plueddemann packages a plethora of pedagogical principles and ideas to help one grow as an effective cross-cultural teacher.

We all have our assumptions about what good teaching is and how an effective teacher will communicate to their students. However, we often fail to acknowledge that one's culture highly influences what is understood to be quality teaching. Plueddemann's main premise is that those who aim to be effective teachers in cross-cultural settings must possess three competencies: (1) they've mastered the content to be taught; (2) they appreciate the cultural values, needs and context of the host learners; and (3) they foster connections between the content and the context of the learners (p. 2).

Subject matter experts (SMEs) often have spent years mastering the first necessary competency (the content to be taught), but often give little regard to the second and third competencies that are vital if transformative learning is to take place. Therefore, throughout the book, the emphasis is to help the teacher realize that the only way to teach effectively across cultures is to seek to understand the learners' culture. This requires the teacher to be more than just an SME. Plueddemann argues that effective teaching demands that the teacher be as well-versed in the learners' culture as they are in the subject matter. "To be a teacher of students, one must first be a student of students" (p. 30).

In the remaining chapters, the author lays out cross-cultural teaching principles and techniques to move the reader to this end. He does this by advocating that teachers embrace the hard and sometimes uncomfortable work of being pedagogically flexible. This will require cross-cultural communicators to be fluent in more than one teaching style. Every chapter of the book ends with the insights of teachers from across the globe, who offer practical steps for the implementation of the pedagogical principles which are highlighted in each chapter.

This concise book of 156 pages can be read in a short period of time, but the adoption and implementation of its contents will be something a teacher will have to lean into for a lifetime. That's a worthy investment of time and effort as one seeks to facilitate transformative learning. One doesn't have to travel overseas to be teaching across cultures. It happens in every pulpit and every classroom one has the opportunity to occupy as teacher. I highly recommend *Teaching Across Cultures* as a valuable resource to anyone seeking to sharpen their skills in the art of teaching.

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